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# SELECTED SPEECHES

OF THE LATE

RIGHT HONOURABLE THE

# EARL OF BEACONSFIELD

ARRANGED AND EDITED

*WITH INTRODUCTION AND EXPLANATORY NOTES*

BY

T. E. KEBBEL, M.A.

With a Portrait

IN TWO VOLUMES — VOLUME I.

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## PREFACE.

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ON giving these volumes to the public, it is my first duty, as it is also my greatest pleasure, to acknowledge the aid which I have received from the friends and colleagues of Lord Beaconsfield. To the MARQUIS of SALISBURY, SIR STAFFORD NORTHCOTE, LORD ROWTON, MR. E. STANHOPE, SIR PHILIP ROSE (one of Lord Beaconsfield's executors), and last, but not least, to BARON DIMSDALE, late Member for Hertford, I am indebted in various degrees for assistance in the process of selection, for the revision of the proof sheets, for the communication of many interesting details, and for the key to Lord Beaconsfield's tactics in more than one Parliamentary campaign. Without these powerful auxiliaries, I could scarcely have presumed to venture on a task of so much difficulty; even with them I am only too conscious how very imperfectly I have discharged it.

T. E. KEBBEL.

*January 17, 1882.*



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# INTRODUCTION.

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THE Speeches of Lord Beaconsfield possess a value peculiar to themselves. Not only do they present us with the opinions of a great statesman in the language of a great orator ; they are also the product of a singularly original and penetrating mind, surveying English history and politics from a perfectly independent position, outside of all the hereditary influences and prejudices of our party life, and unattainable perhaps by one whose mind has been steeped in them from childhood. In this respect they are unique. No other English statesman who has risen to the same eminence has ever contemplated the English constitution from the same external height, or brought to the consideration of political theories an understanding so absolutely unhampered by the shackles of political tradition. That this circumstance was not an unmixed advantage to Lord Beaconsfield himself in his public career may readily be granted. Veteran politicians did not like being told by a young man of five-and-twenty that the whole conception of our party history which had been implicitly accepted by them for the last forty years was wrong from the beginning ; and much of the peculiar animosity which Mr. Disraeli inspired on his first entry into life may be ascribed to this cause. But it was an unqualified advantage to the world at large that our history and our constitution should be subjected to this inde-

pendent criticism, which has, certainly, had the effect of exploding more than one vulgar error on the subject of political parties.

I have accordingly been guided in this work by three principles of selection. It has been my object to select (1) those speeches which exhibit in the strongest light the character of the speaker, and the views of history and politics which were peculiar to himself; (2) those which form an essential part of the history of great public questions, and which are indispensable to the full comprehension of them; and (3) those which are of general and permanent interest, containing maxims and arguments which, in the opinion at least of Lord Beaconsfield's admirers, all future generations may consult with profit.

The difficulty of forming a selection from the speeches of any leading statesman of our own times, whose public career has extended over half a century, must obviously be considerable, if only on account of the number which are now required of him, compared with what would have sufficed some five-and-twenty years ago. But, in the case of Lord Beaconsfield's speeches, the difficulty is at least doubled by the exceptional extent to which the English people are familiar with them. His graver eloquence was often of a very high order; but here he has his equals, and, as many perhaps may think, his superiors. He might have had both perhaps even in the domain in which he now shines without a rival had we the speeches in full of either Charles Townsend or the elder Pitt. In default of such competitors, however, it is no disparagement of any English orator, either living or dead, but a simple fact, to say that no one has ever equalled Lord Beaconsfield in that special combination of humour and sarcasm by which he originally gained the ear of the House of Commons, and which served him more effectually than the most impass-

sioned declamation, in the particular kind of warfare in which he found himself engaged—a warfare which reminds us at one time of the quarrel between Pope and the dunces, at another of the more dignified hostilities between Pope and Addison.

These were the oratorical triumphs which won him the sympathetic admiration of the English people, and it was the consummate and truly racy rhetoric displayed in these encounters which made the deepest impression on their minds. A brilliant repartee, a happy illustration, a choice metaphor, remain embedded in the popular memory, when longer and even higher flights of oratory are forgotten; and Lord Beaconsfield hardly ever made a speech of first-class importance which did not contain some gem of this description. Each of them will probably have its own circle of admirers, who will naturally find fault with a selection in which they look for it in vain. This is a difficulty, the difficulty, namely, of pleasing everybody, which I could not expect to overcome; and I can only therefore throw myself on the indulgence of the public—should I be charged, as I almost certainly shall be, with the omission of speeches which ought to have been included, and the inclusion of others which might just as well have been omitted.

But, if such has been my own principal difficulty, I must warn the reader of two others which he will encounter for himself in perusing the speeches of Lord Beaconsfield. One is the corruptness of the text, in many, if not all his earlier ones; the other is the variety of meanings which the orator was accustomed to attach to the same words. For instance, he as often uses the word democracy to signify a class in society as to signify a form of government. He occasionally uses the word aristocracy when he means oligarchy, and oligarchy when he means aristocracy. And other instances might be given. Finally, perhaps, this may be the place to acknowledge that his style is some-



times obscure, and his constructions harsh, though this is more apparent of course in reading his speeches than it was in listening to them; and I have been assured by veterans of the gallery, that there were no speeches in the House of Commons easier to report than Mr. Disraeli's. To use their own language, he never 'rushed' at a topic or an argument, but was always deliberate, and consequently always intelligible, even when in the disposition of his sentences he was not a little Thucydidean.

His early speeches are in some respects the most interesting of all, because in these the most original side of his mind is turned towards us. After he became one of the recognised chiefs of the Conservative party, and was enrolled among the dozen leading men on whom the country relies in turn for the administration of affairs, the difference between him and others was one less of kind than of degree. His policy on public questions was the policy of a great party moulded to a large extent by its political traditions and based on accumulated experience. His financial policy, his foreign policy, his reform policy might be better or worse than the views espoused by other statesmen; but they were not views of which it could be said that nobody else could possibly have entertained them. They were founded on considerations familiar to all politicians; and though Mr. Disraeli would have impressed his own idiosyncrasy upon everything he undertook, it cannot be said that he imported any absolutely new ideas into the practical questions of the day. But in his conceptions of our political history, and in the creed which he endeavoured to found upon them, he stands entirely alone: nor do I think it improbable that posterity will attach at least as much importance to these as to those more solid achievements in the domain of practical state-manship, which,

during the latter part of his life, threw them completely into the shade. I have accordingly been careful to give as many speeches as I could in which these opinions find expression ; and that the reader may be in a position to do justice to them, I would press upon him the following considerations.

Mr. Disraeli, like Mr. Gladstone, entered public life with a theory ; not one which he had inherited, but one which he had constructed for himself. The period immediately succeeding the Reform Bill of 1832 was favourable to the growth of original opinions, and the tendency of the Romanticist revival which marked the first half of the nineteenth century was to turn men's thoughts upon the past. Mr. Disraeli was stirred by the wave as well as others ; and as to others it came in a feudal or an ecclesiastical shape, to him it came in a political. As earlier forms of society and earlier conditions of religion attracted some minds ; so the earlier struggles of our two great political parties attracted his, who fancied that he saw them reproduced before his own eyes. As Scott loved to brood over the idea of reviving in his own person the feudalism of the Middle Ages : as Newman and Keble, and even Mr. Gladstone, recurred to the Church of the Stuarts as the only remedy for the religious distractions of the day : so did Mr. Disraeli's imagination carry him back to the Toryism of the first Georges as our only protection against the dangers threatened by the Reform Bill. At one period of our history the Whigs had changed the dynasty in order to acquire power ; they had now changed the constitution. Eighteen hundred and thirty-two was sixteen hundred and eighty-eight ; William IV. was another George II., a puppet in the hands of a party, yet chafing under a thralldom from which he was unable to extricate himself. Mr. Disraeli was the champion of a popular Toryism exposing the pseudo-popular pretensions of a Whig oligarchy. What

Wyndham had advocated in 1733 he would advocate in 1833.. That he overlooked certain very awkward differences between the two periods may be granted. But a similar class of differences was overlooked by the feudal and the ecclesiastical revivalist. All three aspirations had their origin in the same source. 'It was the stirring of the blood' when the present century was young. But neither Mr. Gladstone's theory nor Mr. Disraeli's was found to stand the test of experience, and each silently allowed it to drop into the background. Not, indeed, that either of them ceased to look back on it with fondness. Mr. Disraeli, indeed, perhaps as late even as 1867, may have felt that he was to some extent acting up to the letter of his earliest professions. But we find in both constant traces of the early love—indications of an intellectual craving for a creed which was found to be impracticable.

We are next led to ask what there was in the actual world of politics when Mr. Disraeli entered it to lend any colour to such opinions as he expresses in his earlier speeches. We must remember, then, that, strange as his declamations against the Whig Party may sound to ourselves, they represent what was by no means an uncommon feeling at the time, and that among men of long political experience and of what is called sober common-sense. That the Constitution and the empire would be destroyed by the success of the Reform Bill and the continuance of the Whigs in power, is a sentiment which meets us constantly in the correspondence of the Duke of Wellington. Mr. Disraeli had, probably, excellent reasons for saying what he says in 'Coningsby': 'Nevertheless, there existed at this period a prevalent conviction that the Whig party, by a great stroke of State, similar in magnitude and effect to that which, in the preceding century had changed the dynasty, had secured to themselves the government of this country for at least the

lives of the present generation.' Cobbett, whose early Toryism was just what Mr. Disraeli aspired to reproduce, though he had become a violent Revolutionist by the time of the Reform Bill, could say nothing too severe of the Whigs. So that, take it all in all, there was material enough to lend to the world of imagination in which Mr. Disraeli at that time loved to move, the appearance of reality which was necessary to sustain the illusion. But practical experience very soon revealed to him the superficial nature of the analogy which had once misled him; and, though he retained to the last his faith in popular Toryism, he saw clearly enough that the enemies of the constitution and the empire were not to be sought among the Whigs.

There was, however, one tradition of the eighteenth century to which he always clung, and in the first twenty years of his public life, from 1832 to 1852, its influence is conspicuous. Lord Shelburne says of the Tories in the reign of George II. 'that justice has not been done to their character and principles, owing to the never-ceasing outcry of Ministers in confounding them with Jacobites; but in fact they were the landed interest of England, who desired to see an honourable, dignified government conducted with order and due subordination, in opposition to the Whigs, who courted the mob in the first instance, and in the next the commercial interest.'

Almost every word of this might have been written of Lord Beaconsfield. 'The landed interest of England' was, to the day of his death, the object of his devotion; and on it he constantly maintained that the greatness of England had been reared. Hence his opinions on Free Trade and Protection, which were not founded on any disbelief in the economic soundness of the former. But he was irritated by the sophism which represented the Corn Laws as a tax on the food of the people for the benefit of a single class. The territorial system

of England did not exist for its own sake. It conferred enormous benefits on the nation. If you disputed this assertion, and said that you did not want a territorial aristocracy, that was a different question, to be argued at another time. But till you did say so you had no right to describe Protection as a tax on the food of the people for the benefit of a single class. It was a tax on the food of the people for their own benefit; for the sake of a great public object; for the maintenance of a national institution of which long experience had taught them the inestimable value. Granted that protective duties on agricultural produce were required for the maintenance of the territorial system, we must set against these the whole results which flow from the existence of an aristocratic order; from its sagacity and fortitude in the conduct of public affairs; from its moral and intellectual influence on the national life; from its discharge of great local duties, and its close hereditary sympathies with the labouring population; from its patronage of art, science, and literature; from its pride and its chivalry; and it was by no means so certain that the balance would come out in favour of unlimited Free Trade. There were those who questioned both these assumptions; who would deny either that the landed interest was necessary to the welfare of the people, or that Protection was necessary to the support of the landed interest. We have seen his answer to the former proposition. With the latter he would have agreed in the abstract. The landed interest had flourished before the Corn Laws were imposed, and might flourish after they were repealed. But then with the removal of Protection must come the removal of those special burdens on the land for which Protection was the only excuse.

He seems to have thought that Free Trade, salutary free trade, ought to be based on the principle of reciprocity

established by commercial treaties. But as our own financial policy had left us nothing to give in exchange, it was useless, he thought, to rely on reciprocity as an economical principle. Commercial treaties might be useful to England on political grounds, but on no other. The conclusion was that the landed interest must be relieved of those exceptional charges for which when Protection was abolished it received no equivalent whatever. Hence arose the demand for the readjustment of Local Taxation, which in our own time has become a question of the first magnitude, of which for a quarter of a century the Tory party has never lost sight, and which on their accession to office in 1874 they immediately took into consideration.

Of Mr. Disraeli's financial speeches, beyond what I have written in the paragraphs prefixed to each, I am able to say little. He never commanded a majority of the House of Commons while he was Chancellor of the Exchequer; and it would have been impossible for him, as Sir Stafford Northcote has pointed out, to achieve any of those dazzling financial exploits which distinguished the career of Mr. Gladstone, even had he been so minded. Such achievements require for success the support of an unflinching majority and the control of the public revenue for a considerable series of years. Mr. Gladstone brought in eight Budgets in succession; but towards the middle of the series his policy looked very like a failure; and no minister in a minority, certainly not one with Mr. Gladstone in Opposition, could have survived the ordeal of 1862. Nor should it ever be forgotten that Mr. Gladstone, while he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, occupied a position very different from that of Mr. Disraeli when he was Finance Minister. Mr. Gladstone had his hands free; Mr. Disraeli had not. The latter, in addition to the labours of his own department, was leader of the House of Commons. Mr. Gladstone was not. Mr. Disraeli, while

framing his Budget, was at the same time immersed in labours from which Mr. Gladstone during all those years in which his financial reputation was built up was comparatively exempt. Reform Bills, Foreign Policy, the very struggle for existence pressing heavily on the Conservative minister, absorbed a great deal of the time which Mr. Gladstone was able to devote exclusively to finance. But that his genius was well qualified for the mastery of economic science is shown as well by his own financial statements, as by the admitted value of the criticism which he bestowed on others.

The speeches here given on Parliamentary Reform, though not as specimens of oratory among Mr. Disraeli's best, possess considerable value. They vindicate the right of the Tory party to deal with the question as soon as the Whigs had reopened it; and show that Tories had been the earliest Reformers, as they had also been the earliest Free Traders. His own objects in legislation were mainly two: first, the extension of the franchise among the working classes, to compensate them for what they had lost in 1832, coupled with securities for the due representation in the House of Commons of the variety of interests and classes of which the community is composed; and secondly, the increase of the county representation. He always considered it to be of the deepest importance to prevent any single class in the country from obtaining a decisive preponderance in Parliament, and he denied to the last that his own Bill of 1867 was calculated to have that effect.

On Foreign Affairs in general his own Government was accused of very much the same propensity as he himself had constantly condemned in the policy of Lord Russell and Lord Palmerston. But I think all candid and impartial critics will allow that there was a vast difference in the circumstances of the two governments. The Italian question, the Polish ques-

tion, the Danish question, were not in the first place questions which touched the British Empire, while the charge brought against Lord Russell in connection with them was that he irritated and estranged foreign Powers by perpetual and injudicious interference, without diverting them from their objects by the legitimate use of British influence. No reader of these speeches can bring the same charge against Lord Beaconsfield. The questions on which he interfered were those in which our Empire was at stake, and his remonstrances, so far from being futile, produced important and valuable results. He would probably have said himself that his foreign policy steered a middle course between a policy of isolation and a policy of intrusion; that it was strictly a defensive policy, vigilant and energetic, but neither vexatious nor ambitious. It is, however, no part of my present task to reconcile all the discrepancies, either real or apparent, which show themselves between the earlier and the later speeches of this illustrious man. Some of them are due to real changes of opinion, caused by corresponding changes in the condition of the world, in the relations of party to party and of country to country; some to the different degrees of knowledge with which at different times he spoke upon the same subject; others, and not a few, are merely nominal, due to the habit which I have already mentioned of using the same words in various different significations. But whatever may be thought of his policy during the last six years of his life, no one can rise from the dignified and impressive eloquence in which it is embalmed without doing homage to the character of a true patriot.

*Ut cunque ferent ea facta minores,  
Vincet amor patriæ, laudumque immensa cupido.*

I will only add that if changes of opinion on the gravest questions which can occupy the attention of public men be



indeed a crime, then statesmen of eminence, and living statesmen among the number, who are still considered worthy of our reverence, must stand at the bar alongside of him.

The reperusal of these memorable speeches seems to wrap one in a dream. One finds it difficult to believe that the speaker will be heard no more, and that we shall never again see him in that English House of Commons whose fame and honour were so dear to him. Insensibly one's mind wanders back to the days when every eye in that great assembly was fastened on the Tory leader as he sat silent through a hurricane of invective, or rose to retort or to expound. Once more one seems to see that motionless figure, that pale impenetrable countenance, which had betrayed hardly a sign of animation during the speech of his antagonist, suddenly kindle into life and flame as he sprang up in answer to the challenge, confident in his own resources against even the most tremendous odds. Again one hears the ringing rounds of applause or the loud peals of merriment as he successfully demolished what had seemed to be a resistless argument, or turned the tables on an adversary who had rashly tried to be sarcastic. It is hard to persuade one's self that this is all the work of the imagination, and that he will never again, in either House of Parliament, cheer his followers to the fight, sustain the drooping spirits of a party, or vindicate the name and fame of a nation and an Empire.

SPEECHES  
OF THE  
EARL OF BEACONSFIELD.

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PART I.  
*EARLY SPEECHES.*

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HIGH WYCOMBE	.	.	.	JUNE 9, 1832.
HIGH WYCOMBE	.	.	.	Nov. 27, 1832.
HIGH WYCOMBE	.	.	.	DEC. 16, 1834.
TAUNTON	.	.	.	APRIL 29, 1835.



## HIGH WYCOMBE, June 9, 1832.

[In the summer of 1832, a vacancy having occurred in the representation of High Wycombe by the retirement of Sir T. Baring, Mr. Disraeli, then in his twenty-eighth year, presented himself to the electors. Mr. Bulwer had applied to both Mr. Hume and Mr. O'Connell for letters recommending Mr. Disraeli to the electors of Wycombe, a circumstance which Mr. Disraeli describes as follows in a letter to the 'Times' of December 31, 1835, which we commend to the attention of all persons interested in the controversy. 'A friend of mine, interested in my success, knowing that I was supported by that portion of the constituency styled Radicals, applied to Mr. O'Connell and Mr. Hume, with whom he was intimately acquainted, to know whether they had any influence in Wycombe, and requested them to exercise it in my favour. They had none, and they expressed their regret in letters to this gentleman, who forwarded them to me at Wycombe; and my committee, consisting of as many Tories as Radicals, printed them. This is the story of my connection with Mr. O'Connell.' Mr. Disraeli accepted their assistance in the crusade which he was preaching against Whig domination; but it is clear that he made no attempt to gain votes by pretending to be either a Radical like the one, or a Home Ruler like the other. He spoke of the institutions of the country with the greatest veneration. He had told O'Connell that he could not listen for a moment to the repeal of the Union. The one point which he had in common with them, and which entitled him in his own opinion to make use of their support, was disapproval of the Whigs. His opponent, on this occasion, was Colonel the Honourable Charles Grey, son of the Prime Minister; and Mr. Disraeli, whose father resided at Bradenham House in the immediate neighbourhood, came forward as the local candidate in opposition to the Whig nominee. He made the most of

this position, though not able to turn it to full account till after the carriage of the Reform Bill, when he again contested the borough. But as this speech may be said to mark his entrance into public life, I subjoin the brief account of it which is all that I have been able to discover.]

MR. DISRAELI, says the 'Bucks Gazette,' had with much good generalship placed himself on the roof of the covered entrance to the Red Lion, and from this commanding situation addressed the throng in a very able speech. He commenced by saying that he stood before them, not relying on the ties of relationship, or founding his claims to their notice on the merits of his father or any kinsman, but on his own individual intentions. He was a neighbour, living in their close vicinity. He thought, and was sure they would think with him, that a resident member who would at all times be near and accessible to his constituents, who from his contiguity would necessarily know personally so many of the inhabitants, and who would as a resident have more claim to their suffrages, was the person whom they would choose in preference to Colonel Grey, who only came there relying on the merits of his father, and making no pledges of his own principles. . . . He begged them to give him their votes and interest; to remember that he was their neighbour, a dweller amongst them, who had their welfare deeply at heart, and who would prove his gratitude to his constituents by consulting their interest and preserving their independence.

HIGH WYCOMBE, November 27, 1832.

[In his speech of the previous summer Mr. Disraeli had evidently said enough to draw all eyes upon himself, and in the interval which elapsed he had been exposed to merciless criticism. He had been described as a Radical obtaining Tory votes on false pretences. This is how he deals with the charge. In the present circumstances of the country, the Tory party must recur to the principles of its founders. This is the doctrine with which he afterwards familiarised the world both in speeches, pamphlets, and works of fiction; and in the introduction to these volumes I have endeavoured to explain its connection with another great movement of the day, the ecclesiastical renaissance of 1833. Both were regarded at first both by Eldonian Tories and high-and-dry churchmen with a stare of stupefaction.]

I FIND that I have been described in the organs of the present Government as a 'destructive Radical.' It is some consolation to remember that, but a few short months ago, I was therein alluded to as 'a disappointed Tory candidate.' I need scarcely say to you that I have undergone no change. I am as I ever was in motive, principle, and determination. You have undergone no change unless it be for the better—unless it be that you have increased in number, in energy, and in firmness. Thus does the charge of flagrant inconsistency revert to the source from which it emanated. I am a 'destructive Radical,' forsooth, because I have given pledges which, it is said, destroy everything. Let us look at the justice of such a charge. Feeling that a real revolution has occurred in the nation, I have thought much and deeply upon what should be the duty of a statesman at such a time. If, instead of filling the humble position of a private individual, I held a post near the person of my king, I should have said to my sovereign, 'Oppose all

change, or allow that change which will be full, satisfactory, and final.' In the change produced by the professing party now in power, there are omissions of immense importance. These points they promised; these points they have not given you; and now, after all their protestations, they turn round and ask how the people can have the audacity to demand them. Yes, they dare to do this—they dare to shrink from their promises and to express astonishment and horror when the people remind them of their pledges, and clamour at their wilful omission. The two great points which they say we shall never possess, and which we must have, it is scarcely necessary for me to say, are triennial Parliaments and vote by ballot. The first is a just and necessary measure, or I would not stand here as its advocate; and in adverting to its necessity I only support the true principles, the just spirit of our admirable constitution, for that was always best maintained by triennial Parliaments. It best flourished when they were in use; it has been injured when they were abused. If there be any epoch of history more glorious, more satisfactory than another, it is the reign of Queen Anne. Then were our armies most brilliant with success; then were our victories most glorious; for even Waterloo, the most famed of battles, has not obliterated the memory of Blenheim. This was a period of England's greatest eminence, of England's proudest glory; and then there were triennial Parliaments. It was then that the House of Hanover acceded to the crown of these realms; the Whigs got into power, and the nation, blindly confiding in them, elected their nominees throughout the land.

What was the result? Why, when they were returned by a credulous people for three years, they extended their own political existence for seven years, by passing the Septennial Act. In 1716 this measure was carried. A few desolate Tories opposed this arbitrary and unconstitutional edict of a Whig minister, but in vain. Let them, let the Tories again unite in opposing this Act;<sup>1</sup> they will do so with consistency and justice. At that period it was in vain to oppose Sir Robert Walpole, that able and corrupt minister, for he had the popular cry with him; he was backed by the voice of the nation, and

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.* the Septennial Act.

all remonstrance was useless. For twenty years did this profligate minister sway the rod of empire, and administer the corrupt government which he had seized on with so much ability and so much tenacity. After a quarter of a century<sup>1</sup> of the most grinding oppression and open corruption, the Tories again came forward and moved the repeal of the Septennial Bill. Sir William Wyndham, a man of high family, of large property, of weight, influence, and respect, of great authority with his party, in fact the leader of the Tory opposition, proposed this repeal in a speech which for sound argument, keen research, close reasoning, and bitter invective, is, I think, unequalled. A more happy composition is not to be found in the records of Parliamentary eloquence. I need not tell you that this motion failed. Now I, who am cried down and branded as a destructive Radical, only advocate what Sir William Wyndham, the Tory champion, sought to recover as an act of justice to the people, as an essential point in the well-being of the constitution. Lord Bolingbroke, one of the ablest men who ever lived, was a firm and uncompromising Tory, and he advocated triennial Parliaments. He said that without this there was no security for the people, no integrity for the constitution. What these illustrious and able men deemed vitally important, I humbly advocate, and yet I am 'a destructive Radical.' So much for consistency!

Now let us look at the ballot. We are told that this is an innovation, an unjust and an un-English measure. Much, I confess, is to be said on both sides, and I have not formed my opinion without deliberation, and I can see in the great constitution of my country a glorious and admirable structure, to which I would fain add two wings. Under the old system of representation I should not have thought ballot necessary, because that system was anomalous, and ballot could be of little use in a borough that had no electors. But if you will change, if you will give a constituency to every town returning members to Parliament, and if you will give to that constituency the legitimate right which the constitution contemplates,

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.* in 1734, a period from the accession of the House of Hanover of about twenty years.



and which is a freeman's claim, you must add to the elective franchise vote by ballot. My gallant opponent, the breath of whose overpowering and convincing eloquence still hovers about the atmosphere of Wycombe, paused long before he indulged in the tirade which lately obtained so much notoriety through the medium of the 'Times' newspaper. I say to the son of the Prime Minister, that if the Whig ministry had not altered the representative system of the country, we should not have called for ballot; but I now say, that in proportion as the electors increase in number, so does the necessity for the ballot. I am a Conservative to preserve all that is good in our constitution, a Radical to remove all that is bad. I seek to preserve property and to respect order, and I equally decry the appeal to the passions of the many or the prejudices of the few. I alike detest the despotism of an oligarchy and the pre-eminence of a mob. I shall ever seek to confer the greatest happiness upon the greatest numbers, and I conscientiously believe that in advocating triennial Parliaments and vote by ballot, I am labouring to promote this desirable end. As a statesman I should say that it is impossible to refuse popular demands well matured and energetically supported. If so, let the people be fitted to discharge the functions reposed in them; and, as the means to this great end, I would unflinchingly advocate the repeal of the taxes on knowledge, because, though we admire and enjoy the liberty of the press, yet we feel its tyranny. Now, taxed as it is, it requires a large capital to carry on a newspaper, and its interests once established by a large circle of readers, and by an immense supply of advertisements, it bids defiance to the small capitalists who would embark in an untaxed competition, but are now overwhelmed by the oppressive impost laid on by Government.

[What follows is reprinted from the 'Wycombe Sentinel,' November 30, a small single sheet published every Friday during the autumn and winter of 1832-3 by the young Tory party in the Borough.]

Mr. Disraeli then took a most elaborate, luminous and powerful view of the foreign policy of the present administra-

tion. He said he knew it was not a favourite subject with the general, but, while the cannon were thundering from the citadel of Antwerp, he could not be silent. He shewed how the foreign policy of the present administration must lead to an ultimate loss of the sovereignty of the seas, the destruction of our commerce, and finally of our country. He said that peace was now the policy of England. We had gained everything. Now it was our duty to preserve. All domestic policy, he said, at this moment merged into the question of the Corn Laws, doubtless one of the most difficult and delicate that could solicit the attention of a statesman. As it was one which, under any circumstances, must always be a matter of partial legislation, he should feel it his duty to bow to his constituents: nevertheless he should venture to offer them his opinion, and if it appeared to be on the side of the existing system, he was a most disinterested advocate of it, as he had but a very slight stake in the soil; nevertheless, looking to the nature of this county, and to the state of society therein existing, he could not resist the conviction that if we had recourse to any sudden alteration of the present system, we might say farewell to the county of Bucks, farewell to the beautiful Chilterns, farewell to Wycombe market. The cultivators of the soil might then throw themselves, not on the parish, for that would have ceased to exist, but on the barren soil, and there perish. They would ask, is bread, then, to be always dear? By no means, but it was surely better to have dear bread than to have no bread at all. Reduce the burdens that so heavily press upon the farmer, and then reduce his protection in the same ratio. That was the way to have cheap bread. He did not doubt that when the question of tithes was eventually settled, when the poor laws were brought back to the system of 1795, and when we employed our surplus revenue in relieving the agricultural interest instead of sending forth fantastic expeditions to attack our ancient allies—he did not doubt that then we might have the blessing of cheap bread without destroying the interest which is the basis of all sound social happiness.

HIGH WYCOMBE, December 16, 1834. (*The Crisis Examined.*)

[In November 1834, on the removal of Lord Althorp to the Upper House, King William IV., instead of listening to the proposed reconstruction of the Whig ministry, entrusted the Duke of Wellington with the formation of a new one. Sir Robert Peel was at once summoned from Rome; and it was understood that a dissolution of Parliament would take place as soon as he returned. Mr. Disraeli again presented himself to the electors of High Wycombe, and delivered the following speech, afterwards reprinted with the title of 'The Crisis Examined.' Fully to comprehend a speech of this description, the reader must himself have mingled in the transactions recorded in it, and retain a lively recollection of the political passions as well as of the club gossip which at this particular period agitated or amused society. Without this knowledge it must necessarily appear in many passages far-fetched and exaggerated.]

GENTLEMEN,—A considerable period has elapsed since I last had the honour of addressing you within these walls; and in that interval great revolutions have occurred—revolutions of government and revolutions of opinion: I can, however, assure you that I remain unchanged. I appear before you this day influenced by the same sentiments that I have ever professed, and actuated by the same principles I have ever advocated. There are some among my supporters who have deprecated this meeting; who have believed that I stood in so favourable a position as regarded the final result of this contest, that to move might perhaps endanger it; who observing that I was supported by individuals of different opinions, and hitherto of different parties, were fearful that in hazarding explanation, I might hazard discomfiture. But, gentlemen, unless I enter Parliament with a clear explanation of my views, there is little chance of my acting with profit to you or with credit to myself. I cannot condescend to obtain even that distin-

guished honour by jesuitical intrigue or casuistical cajolery ; I cannot condescend at the same time to be supported by the Tories because they deem me a Tory, and by the Liberals because they hold me a Liberal ; I cannot stoop to deception, or submit to delusion.

It is the fashion to style the present moment an extraordinary Crisis. I will not quarrel with the phrase. The times are, indeed, remarkable ; we have a new administration just formed, a new Parliament immediately threatened. It is therefore incumbent on the constituent body throughout the empire to prepare and to resolve upon the course expedient to pursue. Hoping, even believing, that I shall be your representative, I will venture to offer to your consideration the course of policy which, under existing circumstances, I think it the duty of an administration to pursue. And in the first place, I think that administration should be based upon a determination to reduce the burthens, to redress the grievances, and to maintain the rights of the people. I will not, however, shelter myself, and certainly I do not wish them to shield themselves, under a declaration so vague. Let us, therefore, be definite. I think the necessary measures may be classed under four heads: Financial Relief, Ecclesiastical Reform, Sectarian Reform, and Corporate Reform. I will consider the Irish question as collateral to the general one of Ecclesiastical Reform.

As to Financial Relief, I am of opinion that the agricultural interest, at the present moment, is more entitled than any other class to whatever boon the minister may spare. All who hear me know, and most who hear me feel, that that interest is fearfully depressed. We may hope, therefore, that the Exchequer may grant them at least the partial relief of the malt tax, although I recommend them to petition for the whole. I would not at the same time make a request and intimate a compromise. As for any further relief that may be conceded us, I am always an advocate, in spite of political economists, for the abolition of direct taxes. I hope, therefore, the window tax will soon disappear ; it is a tax the most onerous and the most unjust. Further relief we cannot certainly now anticipate.

I approach now the solemn subject of Ecclesiastical Reform.

Church Reform, gentlemen, is the popular cry of the country: and when I recall the desperate professions that have been made, and the abortive measures that have been prepared upon this subject, I confess I recoil from a cant phrase which only reminds me of the intrigues of ignorant faction, or the wily projects of the protectors of vested rights. I hope the time approaches when we may hear less of Church reform, and more of Church improvement. I deem it absolutely necessary that pluralities should be abolished, and that the great and consequent evil of non-residence should be terminated for ever. It is, perhaps, unnecessary for me to observe that I cannot conceive that this all-important object can be obtained without increasing the value of the lesser livings, and the incomes in general of the inferior clergy. Ecclesiastical reform naturally and necessarily draws our attention to Ireland—a name fatal to so many Governments.

I deem it absolutely necessary, even for the existence of the Protestant Establishment itself, that the question of the Irish Church should be forthwith grappled with; that it should be the object of a measure in its nature as final, in its operation as conclusive, as human wit can devise. It is now impossible to avoid, and too late to postpone it; it must be met immediately—the question is, how may it be met efficiently? Twelve months, therefore, must not pass over without the very name of tithes in that country being abolished for ever; nor do I deem it less urgent that the Protestant Establishment in that country should be at once proportioned to the population which it serves. But, gentlemen, I for one will never consent that the surplus revenues of that branch of our Establishment shall ever be appropriated to any other object save the interests of the Church of England, because experience has taught me that an establishment is never despoiled except to benefit an aristocracy. It is the interest of the people to support the Church, for the Church is their patrimony, their only hereditary property; it is their portal to power, their avenue to learning, to distinction, and to honour. I see no reason why the surplus revenues of the Church of England in Ireland should not be placed in trust of the prelates of that land, and

of lay trustees, for the purpose of advancing the propagation of the Protestant faith in Ireland by all salutary and sacred means. We may fail, gentlemen, in this great end, but failure under such circumstances is preferable in my mind to seeing this property, hallowed by its original consecration to the purposes of religion, of learning, and of charity, in the ruthless and rapacious grasp of some bold absentee baron. I know the love that great lords, and especially Whig lords, have for abbey lands and great tithes, but I remember Woburn, and I profit by the reminiscence. As I am upon the subject of Ireland, I will at once declare that I see no chance of tranquillity and welfare for that impoverished and long distracted land, until the Irish people enjoy the right to which the people of all countries are entitled—namely, to be maintained by the soil that they cultivate by their labour. I cannot find terms to express my sense of the injustice and the impolicy, the folly and the wickedness, of any longer denying to Ireland the consolation and the blessing of a well-regulated system of poor-laws. But not, gentlemen, that system which has recently made all England thrill with feelings of horror and indignation, as they wept over the simple, though harrowing, tale of the sufferings of our unhappy neighbours at Bledlow.<sup>1</sup>

Under the head of Sectarian Reform I approach the delicate subject of the claims of the Dissenters. In my opinion these are claims which must not be eluded by any Government that wishes to stand. I would grant every claim of this great body that the spirit of the most comprehensive toleration required, consistent with the established constitution of the country. Therefore, I think that the Registration and the Marriage claims should be conceded. As for the question of the church-rate, it is impossible that we can endure that every time one is levied, a town should present the scene of a contested election. The rights of the Establishment must be respected, but, for the sake of the Establishment itself, that flagrant scandal must be removed. These are concessions

<sup>1</sup> A village near Wycombe, where the alleged ill-treatment of some labouring men by the parish authorities had recently attracted the attention of the London papers.

which, I think, are due to a numerous and powerful portion of our fellow-subjects ; due, I repeat, to their numbers, their intelligence, and their property, and consistent, in my opinion, with the maintenance of an Established Church, a blessing with which I am not prepared to part, and which I am resolved to uphold, because I consider it a guarantee of civilisation, and a barrier against bigotry.

I now arrive at the fourth head under which I classed the measures, in my opinion, necessary to be adopted by the Government, Corporate Reform : a subject, I believe, very interesting to those I am now addressing. I am of opinion that a municipality should be formed upon the model of that mixed constitution which experience has proved to be at the same time so efficient and so beneficial. I am desirous that the burgesses should be elected by the general body of inhabitants of a town, subject, of course, to certain limitations and restrictions ; that the aldermen should be elected by the burgesses, and serve the office of mayor in rotation ; for I never will consent that the mayors and returning officers of boroughs shall be appointed by the Crown. This is part and parcel of the Whig system of centralisation, fatal to rural prosperity and provincial independence—one of those Gallic imitations of which they are so fond, but which, I hope, the sense, and spirit, and love of freedom of Englishmen will always resist. Paris decides upon the fate of France, but I hope we may continue to receive our morning papers by the Oxford coach without acknowledging a ukase in every leading article and recognising a revolution in every riot.

Gentlemen, I need not, I am sure, remind you that peace and economy are two things without which no Government could now exist four-and-twenty hours. The question for you to decide this day is, whether, if a Government be prepared to adopt and carry similar measures to those I have detailed, and are determined to support, with their utmost energy and resolution, everything which may tend to the improvement and amelioration of the society of *this realm*—whether under these circumstances your representative in Parliament is to support such a Government ?

I am glad to hear that cheer. You are not ignorant that a contrary axiom is now laboriously propagated. I am for measures, gentlemen, and not men, and for this simple reason, that for four years we have had men and not measures, and I am wearied of them. But we are told that we ought not to accept any measures from the hands of those who oppose the Reform Bill. This is a proposition which it becomes us to examine with an unimpassioned spirit, and a severe scrutiny, for it is a very important one. The country is now divided into two parties, headed by different sections of the aristocracy: those who introduced, and those who opposed the Reform Bill. Admit the proposition of men and not measures, and the party that introduced that Bill are our masters for life. Are you prepared for this? Is your confidence in the Whigs so implicit, so illimitable, that you will agree to the perpetual banishment of their political rivals from power? Are you prepared to leave the Whigs without opposition, without emulation, without check? I think it very dangerous; I think it very unconstitutional.

But let us examine this famous proposition a little more severely. All of you have heard of the Duke of Wellington's declaration against reform—God knows it is very famous. One would almost fancy that the people of England had listened to a declaration against reform from a Prime Minister for the first time in their lives. And yet but a few years before, a very few brief years, and they had listened to another declaration against reform, not less decided, not less vehement, not less vindictive—ay! and uttered, too, in the House of Commons, and not in the House of Lords—uttered, too, by a Prime Minister, the head of a Government of which all the individuals composing the recent Cabinet were either members or supporters. I allude to the declaration of Mr. Canning—a declaration that compromised<sup>1</sup> Lord Lansdowne and Lord Melbourne, and indeed every member of their party, who are now so loud in their anathemas against apostacy, and their personal horror of rene-gadoes. One solitary Whig alone stood aloof from Mr. Canning,

<sup>1</sup> In the preface to his History of the Whig Party, published in 1852, Mr. Roebuck has some similar remarks on the conduct of the 'Canningites' in relation to Parliamentary reform.



and that was Lord Grey. Will the late Cabinet screen themselves under the shadow of his mantle? Lord Grey did not leave it behind; he did not leave them with his blessing, or the odour of his sanctity. Gentlemen, what strange changes have we not lived to witness! You all remember when my gallant opponent, for whom I entertain sincere respect, first appeared among us. You remember it was the most sudden thing in the world. We did not know where he came from; we thought he had dropped from the skies. You remember that Mr. Ellice, the Right Honourable Mr. Ellice, called upon us to elect the Colonel, although a stranger, out of *gratitude* to Lord Grey. Gratitude to Lord Grey! I suppose when he makes his appearance among us again, we shall be summoned to elect him out of *ingratitude* to Lord Grey, for that seems more the fashion now. Yes, gentlemen! Lord Grey refusing the Privy Seal,<sup>1</sup> and Lord Brougham soliciting the Chief Barony,<sup>2</sup> are two epigrammatic episodes in the history of reform that never can be forgotten.

But, gentlemen, fancy Mr. Spring Rice cheering Mr. Canning in his anti-reform tirade, and Mr. Ellice, the Right Honourable Mr. Ellice, who was so good as to send us down a member, crying ‘Hear, hear,’ and Sir John Hobhouse, who, from his conservatory of consistency, throws stones at the Duke of Wellington—Sir John Hobhouse, the supporter of Mr. Canning, who sailed into public life on the popular wings of annual parliaments and universal suffrage, and afterwards

Got pelted for his pains—

—oh! rare Sir John Hobhouse! Are we to be told that men like these, who backed and supported Mr. Canning under such

<sup>1</sup> In the first Melbourne Administration, July, 1834. An amusing account of both of these incidents is to be found in the *Greville Memoirs*, vol iii. pp. 113 and 157. Lord Brougham himself made the offer to Lord Grey, ‘who rather smiled at the proposition, but did not express the pious resentment of his children. The Grey women would murder the Chancellor if they could.’

<sup>2</sup> In the following November, Lord Brougham, who was out of office, applied to his successor, Lord Lyndhurst, for the office of Chief Baron. Greville thought the appointment might be convenient for the Government. ‘He (Brougham) could cut fewer capers in ermine than he could in plaid trousers’—the Chancellor’s favourite wear.

circumstances, because they afterwards introduced and supported the Reform Bill, possess an exclusive right of calling every man an apostate who sees, in the altered condition of affairs, a ground for applying to a totally different set of circumstances a class of measures essentially new? What an exquisite pretence to consistency there is in saying, 'So pure is the love we bear it, that we will sacrifice for its sake every chance of freedom—that we will endure the worst tyranny, rather than accept the greatest blessings that Reform may shower down upon us from the hands of renegades.' Did any one chalk 'apostate' on the back of Lord Palmerston, or outrage the nerves of those delicate tergiversators, the Messrs. Grant, by squibbing them in the street for their change of opinion? On the contrary, a remarkable abstinence from such crimination prevailed, as I think, gentlemen, it prevails at the present moment. The people were content to accept the Reform Bill as a great remedial measure which they had often demanded, and which had been always denied, and they did not choose to scan too severely the previous conduct of those who conceded it to them. They did not go about saying, 'We must have reform, but we will not have it from Lord Palmerston, because he is the child of corruption, born of Downing Street, and engendered in the Treasury, a second-rate official for twenty years under a succession of Tory Governments, but a Secretary of State under the Whigs. Not they indeed! The people returned Lord Palmerston in triumph for Hampshire, and pennies were subscribed to present him with testimonials of popular applause. The people then took reform as some other people take stolen goods, 'and no questions asked.' The Cabinet of Lord Grey was not ungenerously twitted with the abandonment of principles which the country had given up, and to which no man could adhere who entertained the slightest hope of rendering himself an effective public servant. The truth is, gentlemen, a statesman is the creature of his age, the child of circumstances, the creation of his times. A statesman is essentially a practical character; and when he is called upon to take office, he is not to inquire what his opinions might or might not have been upon this or that sub-

ject; he is only to ascertain the needful and the beneficial, and the most feasible measures are to be carried on. The fact is, the conduct and the opinions of public men at different periods of their career must not be too curiously contrasted in a free and aspiring country. The people have their passions, and it is even the duty of public men occasionally to adopt sentiments with which they do not sympathise,<sup>1</sup> because the people must have leaders. Then the opinions and prejudices of the Crown must necessarily influence a rising statesman. I say nothing of the weight which great establishments and corporations, and the necessity of their support and patronage, must also possess with an ambitious politician. All this, however, produces ultimate benefit; all these influences tend to form that eminently practical character for which our countrymen are celebrated. I laugh,<sup>2</sup> therefore, at the objection against a man, that at a former period of his career he advocated a policy different to his present one. All I seek to ascertain is whether his present policy be just, necessary, expedient; whether at the present moment he is prepared to serve the country according to its present necessities.

Such are the claims to public confidence which may be put forth on behalf of the Whigs; but if instead of being so miserably slender they were indeed substantial and important, I would say that no claims can entitle them to become the masters for life of the British people; and for my own part I have no doubt, and I have ever thought, that they intended to become our masters for life; and decidedly they would have gained their object had they succeeded in swamping the House of Peers as well as packing the House of Commons.<sup>3</sup> One of the most distinguished writers of the day,<sup>4</sup> and a member of the extreme Liberal party in the House of Commons, has recorded

<sup>1</sup> This was notoriously the case with Sir Robert Peel and Roman Catholic emancipation.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Roebuck, in the work just referred to, marks the difference between such changes of opinion as Mr. Disraeli here describes and Sir Robert Peel's change upon the Corn Laws.

<sup>3</sup> See Preface.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Bulwer (the late Lord Lytton) in *England and the English*, book v., chapter 4.

in a work which many of you have read, his regret that he ever was a supporter of the Whigs in their threatened attempt to overpower the House of Lords, and his self-congratulation that the attempt failed. Had it, however, succeeded, gentlemen, it well fits us to consider what would have then become of the liberties of England. I do assure you that in drawing your attention to this important topic I am not influenced by any party, any electioneering views. The remarks which I shall venture to make upon it have pressed upon my mind in the calmness and solitude of study. I will allow for the freedom of the press; I will allow for the spirit of the age; I will allow for the march of intellect; but I cannot force from my mind the conviction that a House of Commons, concentrating in itself the whole power of the State, might—I should rather say would—notwithstanding the great antagonist forces to which I have alluded, establish in this country a despotism of the most formidable and dangerous character. Gentlemen, I repeat, I cannot resist the conviction, because I cannot shut my eyes to the historical truth. Let us look to the reign of Charles I., a period as eventful as, ay, infinitely more so than, any that has since occurred in this country. Believe me, gentlemen, we err when we take it for granted that this present age in England is peculiarly distinguished from preceding ones by the general diffusion of public knowledge and public spirit. Two great revolutions immediately preceded the events of the reign to which I have alluded, revolutions productive of as much excitement and as much effect on the public mind of Europe as the great French Revolution, the Protestant Reformation, and the establishment of a republic in the Netherlands. There was about this time, too, doubtless in some degree impelled by these great and strange events, a spring-tide in the intellect of England. What marvellous men then met within the walls of Parliament! The indefatigable Pym, the inscrutable Hampden, the passionate Eliot, the austere genius of Strafford! Worthy companions of these were St. John, Hollis, Vane; nor should we forget a Digby and a Capel, the chivalric Falkland and the sagacious Clarendon. Why, gentlemen, these were names that imparted to the deliberations of

your Parliament an intellectual lustre not surpassed, perhaps not equalled, even in the brightest days of Pitt, and Fox, and Burke, and Sheridan. There was the same feeling abroad in favour of freedom, and the same enthusiasm for the rights of the subject. There was also, although it is not generally supposed, the same omnipotent influence operating in favour of this cause which we now hug ourselves in believing to be the invincible bulwark of our liberties. Yes, gentlemen, I am inclined to believe that the English press exercised at that moment a power not inferior to the authority it wields at the present day. Every street had its journal, every alley its ballad; besides these great methods of communication, public opinion, that vaunted public opinion, which we would fain believe to be the offspring of the present hour, appealed to the people in favour of the people by an oracle that for political purposes is now happily silent: I mean the pulpit.

Yet, gentlemen, notwithstanding all these checks and all these guarantees—checks and guarantees for your rights and liberties, I maintain, as powerful as any that exist at the present day—what was the result? Your House of Commons, in which you are now called upon to place implicit confidence; your boasted House of Commons, which I for one will no more trust than any other human institution; your omnipotent House of Commons, after having pulled down the throne and decapitated the monarch, after having expelled the bishops from the House of Peers and then abrogated the peerage, set you at defiance. They concentrated in themselves all the powers of the State, and then voted their sittings perpetual; they began by quarrelling with the King about one hundred thousand pounds, and ended, in the short space of five years, in imposing upon the people burdens to the amount of forty millions sterling; confiscated the estates of a large portion of their fellow-subjects, divided themselves into separate committees, and monopolised in their own persons all the functions of the State, and finally, *on one morning, divided among themselves 300,000*l.* of the public money.* Did I say *finally*? Can we forget that this same House of Commons, when their rapacity had dried up all other sources of spoliation, invented the tax most odious to

Englishmen—the excise? and which they laid, too, not merely upon the luxuries, but the very necessities of existence.

Looking then, gentlemen, at such consequences of an implicit confidence in the House of Commons, I confess myself reluctant to quit the vantage-ground on which the constitution of the country is now felicitously placed. Looking at such consequences, I think we may feel that we have some interest in maintaining the prerogative of the Crown and the privileges of the Peers. I, for one, shall ever view with jealous eye the proceedings of any House of Commons, however freely chosen. Nor have I marked in the conduct of the reformed House of Commons anything, I confess, to lull me into over-confidence or security. I think I perceive, even thus early in their career, some symptoms of jobbing which would not have disgraced the Long Parliament itself; and some instances of servility which perhaps we must go to the reign of Charles the Second to rival.

So much for the Reformed Parliament, gentlemen; and now for the Reform Ministry!

One would think, from the cry that is now raised by the partisans of these persons, that they were a band of patriots, who had never been animated by any other sentiment than the welfare of their country, and had never by any chance quarrelled among themselves. The Reform Ministry! Where is it? Let us calmly trace the history of this ‘united Cabinet.’

Very soon after its formation Lord Durham withdrew from the royal councils—the only man, it would appear, of any decision of character among its members. Still, it was a most ‘united’ Cabinet. Lord Durham only withdrew on account of his ill-health. The friends of this nobleman represent him as now ready to seize the helm of the State; a few months back, it would appear, his frame was too feeble to bear even the weight of the Privy Seal. Lord Durham retired on account of ill-health; he generously conceded this plea in charity to the colleagues he despised. Lord Durham quitted the united Cabinet, and very shortly afterwards its two most able members in the House of Commons, and two of their most influential colleagues in the House of Lords, suddenly secede. What a

rent! But then it was about a trifle. In all other respects the Cabinet was most 'united.' Five leading members of the Reform Ministry have departed; let the venerable reputation of Lord Grey and the fair name of Lord Althorp still keep together, and still command the respect, if not the confidence of the nation. But, marvel of marvels! Lord Grey and Lord Althorp both retire in a morning, and in—disgust! Lord Grey is suddenly discovered to be behind his time, and his secession is even intimated to be a subject of national congratulation: Lord Althorp joins the crew again, and the Cabinet is again 'united.' Delightful union! Then commenced a series of scenes unparalleled in the history of the administrations of any country; scenes which would have disgraced individuals in private life, and violated the decorum of domestic order. The Lord Chancellor, dangling about the Great Seal in post-chaises, spouting in pot-houses, and vowing that he would write to the Sovereign by the post; while Cabinet Ministers exchanged menacing looks at public dinners, and querulously contradicted each other before the eyes of an admiring nation.<sup>1</sup> Good God! gentlemen, could this go on? Why, even Mr. Ellice—the Right Honourable Mr. Ellice—who was so good as to send us down a member of Parliament, he could no longer submit to nestle in this falling house, and he, too, quitted the 'united' Cabinet, because he had—what, for a ducat?—a sore throat!

Why, they ridicule themselves! and yet the tale is not all told. There is really too much humour in the entertainment; they make us laugh too much—the fun is overdone. It is like going to those minor theatres where we see Liston in four successive farces. Lord Melbourne, whose claim to being Prime Minister of England, according to the Whigs, is that

<sup>1</sup> This is an allusion to Lord Brougham's celebrated tour in Scotland in the autumn of 1834, when he carried the Great Seal with him. On one occasion it was stolen from him by some ladies, who threw him into a pitiable state of consternation. He told the people of Inverness that he would write to the King that night, to tell his Majesty of their loyalty. Lord Durham and Lord Brougham met at the Edinburgh banquet given to Lord Grey at that time, when they spoke some sharp words of each other; and although Lord Durham had then left office, they are probably the two 'Cabinet Ministers' here intended. Cf. Lord Campbell's *Lives of the Chancellors*, vol. viii. p. 453.

he is 'a gentleman'—Lord Melbourne flies to the King, and informs him that a plan of 'Church reform' has been proposed in the united Cabinet, and that Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Spring Rice, the only remaining ministers in the slightest degree entitled, I will not say to the confidence, but the consideration of the country, have in consequence menaced him with their resignations.

I doubt not, gentlemen, that this plan of 'Church reform' was only some violent measure to revive the agitation of the country, and resuscitate the popularity of the Whigs—a measure which they had never meant, and never desired, to pass. Perhaps, feeling that it was all over with them, it was a wretched *ruse*, apparently that they might go out upon a *popular* measure. However, Lord Melbourne, with as serious a face as he could command, informed His Majesty that the remains of the 'united' Cabinet, Sir John Hobhouse and Lord John Russell, were still as united as ever, and he ended by proposing that the House of Commons should be led by his Lordship, who, on the same principle that bad wine produces good vinegar, has somehow turned from a tenth-rate author into a first-rate politician; and then Lord Melbourne says that the King turned them out. Turned them out, gentlemen! why, His Majesty laughed at them! The truth is, that this famous Reform Ministry, this great 'united' Cabinet, degenerated into a grotesque and Hudibrastic faction, the very lees of ministerial existence, the offal of official life. They were a ragged regiment, compared with which Falstaff's crew was a band of regulars. The King would not march through Coventry with them—that was flat. *The Reform Ministry* indeed! Why, scarcely an original member of that celebrated Cabinet remained. You remember, gentlemen, the story of Sir John Cutler's silk hose. Those famous stockings remind me of this famous Ministry: for really, between Hobhouse darns and Ellice botching, I hardly can decide whether the hose are silk or worsted. *The Reform Ministry*! I dare say, now, some of you have heard of Mr. Ducrow, that celebrated gentleman who rides upon six horses. What a prodigious achievement! It seems impossible; but you have confidence in Ducrow. You



fly to witness it ; unfortunately one of the horses is ill, and a donkey is substituted in its place. But Ducrow is still admirable ; there he is, bounding along in a spangled jacket and cork slippers ! The whole town is mad to see Ducrow riding at the same time on six horses. But now two more of the steeds are seized with the staggers, and lo ! three jackasses in their stead ! Still Ducrow persists, and still announces to the public that he will ride round his circus every night on his six steeds. At last all the horses are knocked up, and now there are half-a-dozen donkeys. What a change ! Behold the hero in the amphitheatre, the spangled jacket thrown on one side, the cork slippers on the other. Puffing, panting, and perspiring, he pokes one sullen brute, thwacks another, cuffs a third, and curses a fourth, while one brays to the audience, and another rolls in the sawdust. Behold the late Prime Minister and the Reform Ministry—the spirited and snow-white steeds have gradually changed into an equal number of sullen and obstinate donkeys ; while Mr. Merryman, who, like the Lord Chancellor, was once the very life of the ring, now lies his despairing length in the middle of the stage, with his jokes exhausted and his bottle empty !

Enough, gentlemen, of the Reform ministry, and the Reformed Parliament. Let us hope that the time has arrived when we may be favoured with a national administration and a patriotic House of Commons. Let us hope that by their salutary influence the peace of Europe and the honour of England may be alike maintained, the great interests of the country fostered and protected, and those considerable changes firmly but cautiously prosecuted in our social system which the spirit of the age demands and the necessities of the times require.

TAUNTON, April 29, 1835.

[On the formation of Lord Melbourne's second Government in 1835, Mr. Labouchere, the member for Taunton, having accepted office, was opposed by Mr. Disraeli, who, in one of the best of his early speeches, explained what he had meant by his previous advocacy of the ballot and triennial Parliaments, and why it was no longer necessary to insist on either of them. The balance of parties deranged by the elections of 1832 had been restored, and the Whigs were no longer dangerous. This was the famous "O'Connell speech" which led to the savage denunciation of Mr. Disraeli by the incensed agitator. That Mr. Disraeli, having once accepted his assistance, would have done better to abstain from reproaching him may be granted without convicting Mr. Disraeli of the slightest political inconsistency. He had always been against Repeal. He spoke of the dismemberment of the Empire in 1835 as he spoke of it in 1880. But the opportunity was too good a one to be lost, and for many years afterwards the circumstances were thrown in his teeth whenever he appeared in public. The speech gave rise to a long correspondence between Mr. Disraeli, Mr. Bulwer, Mr. Hume, Mr. O'Connell, and Mr. Morgan O'Connell, which appeared in the 'Times' and in the 'Globe,' and lasted through the summer and autumn of 1835 into January 1836. As Mr. Disraeli pointed out, had O'Connell applied to himself in the first instance for an explanation of his language, he would have known at once that the words complained of were not applied to him by the speaker, but were but a quotation of the terms which the Whigs had applied to him themselves. The report of the speech here given, which is taken from the 'Dorset County Chronicle,' differs a little from the one given by the 'Morning Chronicle,' which is probably what O'Connell saw. The word 'incendiary' is not found in the local report. But the sense is the same.]

**M**R. BAILIFF and gentlemen electors of Taunton, I will not claim your gratitude for having given you the Reform Bill, but let me claim your gratitude for having given you the first poll under the Reform Bill. Some observations have been

made, gentlemen, deprecating any display of hostile feeling to either of the candidates. I have seen none. I can only say that a more courteous opponent or a more courteous constituency I never encountered and never appealed to; and I trust that as I feel that I have made many friends in Taunton, when I leave it I shall do so without a single enemy. I have at other times been placed before the people, and gentlemen, if I were now to be beaten, as my opponents loudly express themselves, it would be almost preferable to be beaten at Taunton, than to win at any other place. I say this because from one unfortunate expression of mine, evidently spoken in playfulness, you may have believed that, instead of being a very good natured, I was really a very pugnacious person. But when I was assailed under the circumstances of appearing as a stranger the first time before you, I could not refrain from observing that I was the last person to be put down by clamour. Perhaps I may take this opportunity of explaining to that honourable gentleman who seconded my opponent, and who laid so much stress on my observation that 'the Whigs had seized the bloody hand of O'Connell.'<sup>1</sup> Is it possible that so elaborate a rhetorician as that honourable gentleman can have literally supposed that Mr. O'Connell was in the habit of going down to the House of Commons with his hand reeking with gore, or that the Whig Government crawled upon their knees to embrace it? I meant they had formed an alliance with one whose policy was hostile to the preservation of the country, who threatens us with a dismemberment of the Empire which cannot take place without a civil war.

My honourable opponent says that the Whigs would not go a hair's breadth to gain the assistance of Mr. O'Connell. Permit me to remind you that the Whigs have already gone much further. My honourable opponent says 'No.' What! have they not adopted the principle which twelve months ago they opposed, to secure his support? If they have done this

<sup>1</sup> No report is to be found of the speech in which this sentence occurs. It may have been used in a speech made by Mr. Disraeli to some of his supporters in a room at the Castle Inn on the night of his arrival in Taunton, April 21, which is mentioned but not reported by the *Taunton Courier*, April 22.

to gain his support and put them in power, what will they do to gain his support to keep them in power? It is much more difficult to retain power than to obtain it; if they mean to keep that power on the hair-breadth principle, they will soon have to return back to their constituents. I cannot understand the principle by which the Whigs would reform, as they style it, the Church of Ireland. It appears to me that they have offered a premium to the *White Boys* to destroy the Protestants. If forty-nine souls are not worthy to be saved whilst fifty are, I think we shall soon have no congregations in Ireland which exceed the Popish tariff of salvation. My honourable opponent has told you that the subject of the Irish Church is one that places the existence of the kingdom in hazard. I confess it; but who has brought it to such a crisis? Gentlemen, it was the ambition of that weak aristocratic party in the State, who could only obtain power by leaguering themselves with one whom they had denounced as a traitor. If the Irish Church has always been the intolerable nuisance it is described, why has this nuisance been so lately discovered? It is upon record that twenty years ago tithes were paid more readily in Ireland than rents are now in England. Gentlemen, it is agitation that has made the nuisance, and it is the Whig party who, for their own ends, have encouraged the agitator. Gentlemen, I am just reminded that I have written a novel. (Cries of 'A good one.') I am glad there is a critic in the crowd who joins with me in opinion. I trust there is no disgrace, gentlemen, in being an author. I trust there is no disgrace in having written that which has been read by thousands of my fellow-countrymen, and which has been translated into every language in civilised Europe; and I trust that one who is an author by the gift of nature is as good as one who is Master of the Mint by the gift of Lord Melbourne.

This I do know, gentlemen, that twelve months hence I shall still be the author of 'Vivian Grey,' though I shall be very much surprised if at the same period my honourable opponent be still Master of the Mint. Gentlemen, this speech about the novel reminds me of the only charge of which I am accused. Really I think my opponents, if they wished to succeed

me, should at any rate have taken care that their attacks were original. I think it is some reflection on the intelligence of Taunton that they should copy an anonymous article from a London newspaper. Though I have despatched the novel, I cannot help remembering that the editor of the 'Sun' declares that I am the puppet of the Duke of Buckingham, and a fellow-labourer in the same vineyard. The editor of the 'Morning Chronicle' announces that I am a Marylebone Radical. Gentlemen, if there be anything on which I pique myself it is my consistency. Well, I shall be ready to prove that consistency either in the House of Commons or on the hustings of Taunton. Every man may be attacked once; but no one ever attacked me twice. Gentlemen, here is my consistency. I have always opposed with my utmost energy the party of which my honourable opponent is a distinguished member. That party I have opposed for reasons I am prepared to give and to uphold.

As the question 'What is he?' has been repeated by Mr. Bunter, I should wish to reply to it, that hereafter there may be no mistake. When I first entered into political life, I found the high places of the realm filled by the party of which my opponent is a member. I found they had an immense majority in the House of Commons, gained by a system of nomination not less equivocal than that of the late borough-mongers. Believing that the policy of the party was such as must destroy the honour of the kingdom abroad, and the happiness of the people at home ——. That was my opinion, though I perceive it is not the opinion of some here. I believed that if the Whigs remained in office for any length of time, this glorious, this unrivalled Empire would perish for ever—I considered it my duty to oppose the Whigs, and to ensure their discomfiture and, if possible, their destruction as a party. Let me recall to your recollection the extraordinary characteristics of the political world when I entered it. Gentlemen, the great safeguard of our liberties, the balance of power, was destroyed. There was then no constitutional opposition to keep the Government in check. That great Tory party, which is now so strongly constituted, was a shattered, a feeble, a disheartened fragment,

self-confessing their own inability to carry on the King's government, and announcing an impending revolution. Gentlemen, had I been a political adventurer, I had nothing to do but to join the Whigs; but conscientiously believing that their policy was in every way pernicious, I felt it my duty to oppose them. But how were they to be opposed? Where were the elements of a party to keep the Government in check, and to bring back the old constitutional balance? I thought they existed in the liberal Tories, and in those independent reformers who had been returned to Parliament independently of the Whigs. I laboured for their union, and I am proud of it. Gentlemen, remember the Whig policy; they had a packed policy. They had altered the duration of Parliaments once before. They had the whole power of the State in their hands. I believed, and I still believe, that we were nearer to a Long Parliament than we imagined. I wished to break their strength by frequent elections and frequent appeals to a misgoverned people; therefore I advocated a recurrence to those triennial Parliaments which it was once the proudest boast of the Tories to advocate. I wished to give the country gentlemen a chance of representing the neighbouring towns where they are esteemed, instead of the nominees of a sectarian oligarchy. Therefore I proposed the adoption of the ballot in the only constituencies willing to assume it.

And now where is my inconsistency? Have I not given an answer to my assailants? I am convinced that the result of these measures would have been that which I anticipated. Strong measures, certainly; but when are strong measures to be adopted if not when our country is in danger? Had the Whigs remained in power—and it seemed to me, and the wisest men in the kingdom shared my conviction, that they were our masters for life<sup>1</sup>—had, I repeat, they remained in power, I considered the dismemberment<sup>2</sup> of the Empire inevitable, and therefore I tried to root them out. But, gentlemen, great, nay almost illimitable as was my confidence in Whig incapacity, I confess they far surpassed even my most sanguine

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Disraeli repeats this assertion in *Coningsby*. Cf. Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Wellington Despatches of this period, *passim*.

expectations ; the mighty Whig party, which had consented to a revolution to gain power, fell to pieces, the vessel of the State righted itself, and now there is no necessity to cut away its masts.

Gentlemen, the object for which I laboured is attained ; the balance of parties is restored : and now, gentlemen, I do not longer advocate the measures in question, simply because they are no longer necessary. Is this an answer ? Is this inconsistency ? When I hear my honourable opponent say he comes before you as the advocate of the same principles which brought him here five years back, I would ask him in sincerity, what these principles are. Are they the principles of the renowned Government which gave you the Reform Bill ? If so, why has the head of that very Cabinet left the Government of which my opponent is a member ? Lord Grey has left them with disgust. Are the principles of the honourable gentleman the principles of Lord Stanley ? And he has left ; and others also. Gentlemen, he says, during that period, the slaves have been emancipated. That great measure was carried by that illustrious statesman, Lord Stanley, who will have nothing to do with them. The Whigs profess economy ; they imitated the Duke of Wellington. They say that a reduction of taxation has taken place : thanks to the political unions that forced themselves into the antechamber of the Minister. Did the Tories ever repeal a tax one night and rescind the resolution of relief the next ? Gentlemen, that act alone sealed the fate of the Whig Parliament. Could the slaves of a Turkish Pacha be more servile ?

I am asked why Sir Robert Peel dissolved Parliament. I answer, because he knew well the Parliament was insincere in Reform. The House of Commons consisted of the tools of the Whig party. The best answer to the Whigs, why the Parliament was dissolved, is that 105 additional Conservatives have been returned. Gentlemen, there will be a better answer when it is dissolved the next time—that dissolution will be very speedy. I fear I shall not have the honour of representing you long before that takes place. I am asked how can Sir Robert Peel be a Reformer ? There has not been a greater number of

votes recorded against Reform by any man than have been recorded against it by Lord Melbourne. Lord Melbourne put the amendment to the question of the Manchester Massacre, of which so much has been said. He was one of the hottest Tories that ever existed, and now he is prime leader of the Whigs.

Gentlemen, I believe there is some gentleman here who wishes to hear something about the bishops. That great practical measure of Church Reform which the Tories had the honour of producing to the public, satisfactory and extensive in its details, is a measure of reform brought in by the Tories, a measure which goes to the equalisation of the bishops in the first place ; in the second place, puts an end to pluralities for ever ; in the third place, terminates the evil of non-residence ; and in the fourth place, ensures the general commutation of tithes. These are four great questions which have so long agitated the country. The same Tory Government in four months did ample justice to the rights and wishes of that important part of our population, the Dissenters. Gentlemen, I have ever been and am a supporter of the Church of England, because I believe it to be the great bulwark of civil and religious liberty ; because I consider the leaders of the Church have been the leaders of the people in a great crisis of our country ; and these very bishops have saved the constitution of the realm.





## PART II.

### *SPEECHES ON AGRICULTURAL INTEREST, FREE TRADE, AND CONDUCT OF SIR ROBERT PEEL'S GOVERNMENT.*

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THE NEW TARIFF . . . . .	MAY 10, 1842.
IMPORT DUTIES . . . . .	APRIL 25, 1843.
SPEECH AT SHREWSBURY . . . . .	MAY 9, 1843.
SUGAR DUTIES . . . . .	JUNE 17, 1844.
OPENING OF LETTERS BY THE GOVERN- MENT . . . . .	FEB. 28, 1845.
AGRICULTURAL DISTRESS . . . . .	MARCH 17, 1845.
MAYNOOTH . . . . .	APRIL 11, 1845.
ADDRESS . . . . .	JAN. 22, 1846.
AMENDMENT TO MOTION FOR GOING INTO COMMITTEE OF WHOLE HOUSE	FEB. 20, 1846.
CORN IMPORTATION BILL, THIRD READ- ING . . . . .	MAY 15, 1846.
INCOME-TAX . . . . .	MARCH 10, 1848.
LOCAL TAXATION . . . . .	MARCH 8, 1849.
STATE OF THE NATION . . . . .	JULY 2, 1849.
AGRICULTURAL DISTRESS . . . . .	FEB. 19, 1850.
” ” ” . . . . .	FEB. 11, 1851.
” ” ” . . . . .	MARCH 28, 1879.
” ” ” . . . . .	APRIL 29, 1879.

For the effect produced by these speeches at the time they were delivered the contemporary press must be consulted. It was simply electrical. All England, not to say Europe, rang with the daring apophthegms and exquisite humour which delighted and convulsed the House of Commons. During these three or four years, and while Parliament was sitting, it was almost impossible to take up a newspaper without one's eye being caught by some reference to Mr. Disraeli's last witticism. The present generation seems inclined to admit that the provocation given by Sir Robert Peel, especially by the style in which he lectured his former supporters for adhering to the principles in which he himself had so long and so sedulously trained them, was, if not sufficient to justify every one of these attacks, far greater than the victorious converts were either willing to acknowledge, or perhaps even able to appreciate. Their success, their talents, and the popularity of the cause they had espoused, dazzled the public eye, and neutralised for a time all the efforts of a beaten party to vindicate the justice of its anger. But we may learn from Mr. Morley's *Life of Mr. Cobden* that the old Free Traders, at all events, were doubtful of the political morality which sanctioned the carriage of Free Trade in a Parliament dedicated to Protection, and that they saw little to condemn and something to applaud in Mr. Disraeli's satire.

THE TARIFF, May 10, 1842.<sup>1</sup>

[On this day Sir Robert Peel explained the chief provisions of his new Tariff; and Mr. Disraeli in reply to Mr. Labouchere took occasion to remind the House and the public that Free Trade originated with the Tories.]

MR DISRAELI said—with reference to the accusation made on the other side of the House, that the right honourable baronet at the head of the Government had repudiated principles when in opposition which he had adopted when in office—that that charge had been made without due examination of the facts of the case. He did not think that the honourable gentlemen opposite had succeeded in making out their claim to being peculiarly the originators of the principles of free trade; and as it was of great importance that the House should have as correct a knowledge as possible as to the pedigree of those particular dogmas, that gentlemen opposite should not continue to consider that the country was indebted to themselves for the doctrines of free trade, or gentlemen on his own side imagine that those doctrines were of such recent and modern invention as was generally supposed, he might be allowed to remind the House that it was Mr. Pitt who first promulgated them, in 1787. At the time when this country had been deprived of the great colonial market of America, he was led to look round for new markets on the continent of Europe, and first developed that system which he considered should form the future commercial policy of the country. Mr. Pitt said that we must begin to carry on commerce upon a system of complete reciprocity—that we must lower our duties, and consolidate our customs. This was at a time when the

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

Whigs ranked among their numbers such names as those of Fox, Sheridan, Burke, Sir Philip Francis, and the distinguished relative of the noble Viscount (Viscount Howick) opposite, and yet Mr. Fox, on a question in which the principles of the then proposed commercial policy was discussed, denounced those new principles of commercial reciprocity, and said they formed altogether a new system, in which not only were the established doctrines of our forefathers departed from, but all the essential principles on which our commerce had been previously conducted were to be changed and abandoned. Mr. Burke and Mr. Sheridan also strongly opposed the commercial system recommended by Mr. Pitt. In the House of Lords, too, the opposition to it was still more strong and efficient, and the opinions of Mr. Pitt upon commerce were so far in advance of the age that not even a member of his own Government in the House of Lords was willing or competent to become their advocate.

The task devolved on Lord Hawkesbury, not then a member of the administration: an able man, whose mind had been directed to such studies. Yet he could not maintain the controversy against the violent assault of Bishop Watson, who brought forward a mass of statistical details (rare materials of Parliamentary debate in those days) to prove that the system of Mr. Pitt was utterly erroneous, and that the first method of carrying it into effect—namely, a commercial treaty with France—was pregnant with ruin to British trade. It was the repeated attack of Bishop Watson, and its effect on the audience to which it was addressed, that brought from his retirement the most remarkable man of his age, Lord Shelburne. Let honourable gentlemen read and digest the speech delivered by Lord Shelburne in answer to Bishop Watson, on the French treaty; and they will then find that instead of that great progress which we are too apt to suppose public men have made of late years in the science of political economy, we are at this moment far behind many of the great statesmen who flourished at the end of the last century. The principles of free trade were developed—and not by Whigs—fifty years ago; and how was it that the Whig party now came forward, and

contended that they were the originators of these opinions? But what was the conduct of the Pitt party after the peace? Was the party which originally brought free-trade principles into notice at that period false to those principles? If that question were fairly examined, it would be found that exactly the reverse was the case, and that, on the very first possible occasion, the administration of Lord Liverpool showed itself in advance of the years [*sic*] upon the question of a greater freedom of trade. Before Mr. Huskisson exercised his great and beneficial influence on the commercial legislation of this country, Mr. Wallace and Mr. Robinson had carried a series of measures founded on the true principles of commerce, and Mr. Huskisson only prosecuted their system; and in what the right honourable baronet now proposed it was manifest that he was doing neither more or less than carrying into effect principles which originated with Mr. Pitt. The conduct pursued by the right honourable baronet was in exact harmony, in perfect consistency, with the principles in reference to free trade laid down by Mr. Pitt, and his reason for saying thus much was to refute the accusations which had been brought against the present Government, that, in order to get into and, being in, to keep office, they had changed their opinions on these subjects.

FREE TRADE, April 25, 1843.<sup>1</sup>

[On February 13, Lord Howick had moved 'that the House do resolve itself into a Committee of the whole House, to consider so much of Her Majesty's Speech as relates to that depression of the manufacturing interest of the country which has so long prevailed, and which Her Majesty has so deeply lamented.' The object of the motion was of course an attack upon the Corn Laws. A debate ensued which extended over five nights, and on the second night Mr. Disraeli addressed himself to the question how far it was possible to find relief for our commercial distress in an extension of our commerce.

'Our markets,' said he, 'might fairly be divided under three general heads—our European markets, the markets of the East, and the markets of the New World. Our European markets must be regulated by commercial treaties.' And he then went on to comment on four projected treaties of commerce which had not yet been carried out: namely, with France, with Spain, with Portugal, and with Brazil. Mr. Morley says of this speech that it is 'remarkable to this day for its large and comprehensive survey of the whole field of our commerce and for its discernment of the channels in which it would expand.'<sup>2</sup> But I have preferred to give the speech which follows, for the sake of the remarks which it contains on the disposition of foreign States. On April 25, Mr. Ricardo, the member for Stoke, moved that remission of duties should not be postponed to the execution of commercial treaties. Mr. Disraeli here refers to his favourite doctrine that these questions could not be decided exclusively by political economy.]

MR. DISRAELI said that the noble lord who had just addressed the House had indulged in a traditional sneer against the right honourable baronet (Sir R. Peel) for his policy with respect to what was called the balance of trade. It had been

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Cobden*, vol. ii. p. 336.

truly said by Sir Walter Raleigh that what was wrong in the main might still be right in the detail. Now, he considered that anything that could cause a sudden abstraction of the precious metals from this country must necessarily affect the commercial transactions of the country at the same time. This was a subject which rendered the consideration of the honourable member's motion of the deepest importance. Three years ago, they made a very large importation of corn from Germany, at which time the Bank of England had negotiated a loan of money with the Bank of France. They all remembered the effects of that mercantile transaction upon the currency of this country. It was difficult to forget the humiliations that were cast upon them when it became known what were the terms on which this loan was effected between the two countries. No person could deny the abstraction of precious metals which then took place from England, which resulted in the most serious consequences. Their currency was deranged, prices were generally reduced, and wages fell considerably. A mercantile convulsion had actually taken place. This sudden abstraction of 3,000,000*l.* of their precious metals was a very serious evil; but he would ask, if the proposition of the honourable member for Stoke were agreed to, whether the abstraction of precious metals would not be larger than in 1839.

This was a subject of consideration totally independent of the balance of trade. It was a consideration that must occur to every person who took an interest in the subject. The noble lord contended that the abstraction of precious metals did not do much injury to the country. He believed that this was a point that was acknowledged to be one of the highest importance by the greatest economists in this country. This, he believed, would be the immediate consequence of the policy that was now recommended. It was their duty to inquire what was the opinion of foreign economists on this subject. There was ample evidence on this point to guide the people of England in their opinions on this subject. The work of Dr. Listz, and those of a great many other men, referred to the circumstance and the results of the great importation of corn by England from the continent of Europe in 1839. They alluded to the sudden ab-



straction of the precious metals, which materially affected their trade and the interests of this country. There was a conviction in the public mind of Germany that if they could occasion an abstraction of precious metals from England in a systematic way, they would raise prices in their own country, and lower prices in this country. He knew that some honourable gentlemen opposite would say that prices were but a relative consideration, and of itself the subject was of no great importance ; but such abstract truisms involved a practical error. He was of opinion that the sudden lowering of prices must deeply affect, not only the profits of capital, but the most important interests of the country.

It was highly important for the House to consider what might be the effect of such a course as was now advised upon their monetary system. Some might say that everything would ultimately find a level. Natural philosophers, who deal with principles, dogmatise ; but statesmen, who deal with circumstances, must negotiate. It was possible that they might carry on a trade with less expensive transactions more profitable than a trade with more expensive ones. No one could deny that as they had relaxed their duties, foreign countries had increased theirs. If they intended to proceed in the course that was now recommended, they should be prepared for a systematic abstraction of the precious metals. He would ask, were they prepared for the consequences ?

He could not conceal from himself—if such principles as these were carried out—there would be a great chance of their revenue being diminished, their commerce deranged, their prices lowered, and the wages of labour considerably diminished. Supposing that these prices were to go on for two, three, four, or five years, before the truth should suddenly flash upon the minds of the Government, he wanted to know if this country were prepared for this ordeal. He wondered what the effect would be if they had even the short experience of three years of these predicted changes. What would be the state of England during the working of this experiment ? There would be an immense mass of individual suffering, followed by frequent bankruptcies ; all the banks would be broken, the whole

commercial system would be in a state of derangement; the revenue of the country would be upheld only by having recourse to the most violent attacks on property. He thought these were events that were more than probable—he thought they were inevitable. But surely there were considerations which were of great importance in viewing the case which ought not to be omitted. The House was called upon by the speech of the honourable member for Stoke-upon-Trent to open free ports as against the hostile tariffs of other countries. These were subjects which occupied the minds of Continental statesmen, and were of such importance in the economical system of Germany, especially, that he was surprised they had not occupied more attention, but which, right or wrong, ought to occupy their attention if honourable gentlemen thought of what must ultimately result to the continent of Europe, still remembering, however, that before that result was arrived at we must be the intermediate sufferers, and perhaps the victims.

There was another circumstance which seemed to be overlooked by those who held extreme opinions on these subjects: they were apt to think that the Governments of Europe proposed to themselves no other objects in their commercial arrangements than the wealth of nations, and totally omitted from their view one of the most prevailing influences—the political considerations which were always mixed up with industrial habits. These honourable gentlemen talked of what they called ‘vested interests’ which were raised and cuddled and pampered with protection, and they said that such an artificial class might do very well for a time, but the system was fallacious: it must ultimately prove ruinous; but, at the same time, the public mind, they admitted, was not enlightened, though a Government must see that such pampered manufacture was a losing concern. Such was the case with the cotton manufacture in France formerly, though now no longer the case. As long as pounds, shillings and pence alone were consulted, these gentlemen were right, and a trade so circumstanced must be given up.

But honourable gentlemen opposite seemed to forget that some Governments perhaps proposed to maintain certain manu-

factures as the elements of future strength. At this moment there were around the city of St. Petersburg some fourteen or fifteen factories which were worked at a great loss, and the loss was paid, and was cheerfully paid, by the Government—it was paid by the Government, as ostentatiously announced, to keep these places up as models to stimulate the industry of the country. Whether eventually this principle might be given up by the Governments of Europe was a matter of speculation, but until those Governments had accepted our high notions of political economy this country was likely to encounter such a state of transitive suffering as would render it impossible to calculate what commercial losses, what financial distresses, and what political catastrophes it might involve. It was impossible to shut their eyes to the effect which years of commercial distress and financial difficulty might have on our political institutions. Admitting the general justice of these principles of public economy which had of late years exercised great influence in those countries, was it not the natural course to adopt the happy medium which was always followed by practical men—that system of reciprocity by means of which through negotiation they might obtain those benefits which they all acknowledged in increased commerce, and avoid those dangers that might possibly attend a less cautious and prudent course? This was the wiser system to adopt under any circumstances. If the benefits proposed by the honourable member for Stoke were merely speculative; more than all, if his principles might tend to great disasters, it followed most satisfactorily that they should take that course which, while it secured all the advantages he proposed, at the same time insured them against the dangers with which they were menaced.

There was another circumstance which should not be left out of their consideration. It would be found that in every one of those countries with which we sought treaties of commerce considerable interests existed that advocated our policy. It should be remembered that these powerful interests were founded upon, and existed only in consequence of, our commercial system. The Chamber of Lyons, and that more powerful interest the wine interest of France, must sooner or later obtain

for us a treaty of commerce with that country; and if not so advantageous as might have been secured in 1840, it should at least be remembered that it was no fiscal or commercial circumstance which, in that instance, had operated to our disadvantage. The noble lord, the member for Sunderland, had treated the right honourable Vice-President of the Board of Trade somewhat unfairly in the reference he made to the speech in which he answered the honourable member for Stoke. The noble lord said his right honourable friend had misrepresented the object and purpose of this motion: he said that the motion was a most practical and moderate one, whereas the Vice-President of the Board of Trade had made a speech which was directed solely against extreme opinions. The right honourable gentleman had answered the speech of the honourable member for Stoke. The speech of the honourable member for Stoke was very different from his motion. His motion might be very guarded, moderate, and, in the opinion of some, very practical; but it was impossible to dis sever the speech by which it was prefaced from the motion which was ultimately submitted. The honourable member for Stoke did not attempt to conceal his opinions; boldly, clearly, perspicuously, in the most manly way, he announced his adhesion to the most ultra-free-trade opinions. The honourable gentleman had come in like a lion, and gone out like a lamb; but when he gave a programme of his opinions which was to have its effect on the country, although he concluded with what the noble lord called a very moderate and practical motion, the Vice-President of the Board of Trade was not bound to confine his reply to the limited and moderate motion and allow the more general extreme opinions of the honourable member for Stoke to pass unnoticed.

The motion of the honourable gentleman meant that they should fight against hostile tariffs with free imports, and nothing else. For himself, he believed that would be a policy financially of the most disastrous kind; at any rate, there was sufficient evidence before them to prove that its immediate consequences would be tariffs more hostile to England, and under these circumstances it was not for the honourable gentleman who had introduced the motion, or his friends, to say that the

opinions they had avowed in favour of what they chose to call 'free trade' should not be replied to. The expression 'free trade,' as originally brought into public notice, designated very different principles from those it denoted in the mouths of the gentlemen opposite. It was first used by economists of very great celebrity, in contradistinction to the old colonial system, and meant a large and liberal intercourse—a free navigation from port to port; but honourable gentlemen opposite attached to it a much more extensive signification, which the original authors of the expression never contemplated.

There was obviously some analogy between civil and commercial freedom. A man was not the less free because he was subject to some regulations and taxes; but honourable gentlemen opposite meant by 'free trade' an absence from all restrictions. But really the honourable gentlemen opposite spoke of restriction in the spirit of those of whom Milton had said—

Licence they mean, when they cry liberty !

A peculiar characteristic of the free-trade school was their total neglect of circumstances—they never took any circumstances into consideration. He had stated that as a consequence of our commercial system powerful interests had grown up in other countries to advocate and enforce our views; if those parties succeeded in their endeavours, if commercial arrangements were brought about, we should immediately have a considerable increase to our trade without intervening danger of any kind; but honourable gentlemen might rest assured, if they were to be guided by what was said or, what was of more importance, by what was written in Europe and America at this moment, they never would succeed unless they took a decided course. If they meant to obtain advantages by negotiation they must unreservedly announce it, and certainly it would not be long before they attained their end, because the minister of England who negotiated was placed in a much more favourable position than the minister of any other country. He could say what the minister of no other country could say: he could say to the President of the United States with his hostile tariff: 'There is a country belonging to the Queen of England that, if needs-

sary, can produce illimitable quantities of that cotton of which you boast so much ;' he could say to St. Petersburg : ' That very same country, within three months, in 1843, has sent ships to the port of London with cargoes of flax, hemp, and tallow ;' and without sending a special mission to Brazil, without the expense of the mission or the mortification of failure, he could tell the Brazilian Minister : ' That very same country in one of its vallies produces sugar enough to feed the whole world, and in another district produces coffee superior to that of the Brazils.' These were facts the knowledge of which was not confined within the walls of the House of Commons ; they were continually referred to in the political and economical dissertation in Europe : there was not a statesman in Russia or America that was not frightened at the available resources of India.

These were the elements of negotiation : as such they ought not to be forgotten ; they were the elements of our strength if we chose to resort to them. He thanked the House for the attention with which they had listened to his observations. He had endeavoured to meet the question fairly. He thought the policy recommended by the honourable member for Stoke founded on principles which were utterly fallacious, and, if pursued, it would immediately produce financial consequences of the most disastrous kind by its effect on the monetary system of the country : he thought by adopting the medium course, the principle of reciprocity, they would secure a very considerable share of the advantages contemplated by the honourable mover, without endangering most important interests, and he thought the principle of commercial treaties was the only one that could be adopted in the complicated state of our relations. If carried into effect, it took its form in that public compact which the law of nations and the manners of Europe had sanctioned. He did not think they could do better in attempting to gain those commercial advantages which they all desired than adhere to that system of negotiation by means which they could always have recourse to, which were always understood, which if they failed to-day might succeed to-morrow.

EXPLANATION TO CONSTITUENTS OF HIS VOTES  
IN PARLIAMENT, SHREWSBURY, May 9, 1843.

[This speech was delivered just at that moment when the thorough-going Protectionists were first beginning to express their suspicions of the policy of Sir Robert Peel. On this occasion Mr. Disraeli defended him. The new Corn Bill and the Tariff of 1842 were the measures which provoked the greatest hostility, and provincial Tory papers proclaimed in capital letters that Sir Robert Peel had forfeited the confidence of the Conservative party. Mr. Disraeli, however, went to the root of the matter in the latter part of his speech, in which he avowed himself a Protectionist, not on economical, but on social and political grounds. His description of the landed interest in this speech raises the whole question which really underlies Conservative and Radical principles. It is the old theory, the theory of the eighteenth-century Tories, the theory of the Duke of Wellington and Lord Stanley. The landed interest is the foundation of our national greatness: our constitution is a territorial constitution. This interest embraces, not only the Church and the monarchy, but the great body of local and unpaid jurisdictions which form a part of English life, and must be considered with reference to all the habits, virtues and traditions which it has fostered for centuries: to the moral results, that is, for which we were indebted to Protection. All this is not lightly to be imperilled even for the benefits promised us by free trade. Sir. R. Peel was only revising the Tariff as it periodically required to be revised—as it had been revised by Mr. Pitt and Lord Liverpool. The speaker then went on to say :—]

I AM not an enemy myself to free trade, according to my idea of free trade. I have shown it in every vote I have given in Parliament. I have never supported either prohibitions or monopoly, nor have I made native industry the stalking-horse by which to uphold any abuses. But my idea of free trade is this—that you cannot have free trade unless the person you deal with is as liberal as yourself. If I saw a

prize-fighter encountering a galley-slave in irons, I should consider the combat equally as fair as to make England fight hostile tariffs with free imports; and I feel persuaded myself that system will be pursued—though I do not mean for a moment to say that the present Government are going to pursue it; but, I say, the present Government may, by the chapter of accidents, be compelled to pursue anything—if the great mass of the constituency have not firm opinions on the subject and will not support the Government, which is pressed by what is called a ‘liberal minority,’ incessant in their exertions in the House of Commons, and organised in their exertions in the country. Do not, I beg, suppose I am sceptical as to the dispositions of the present Government; but we live in a time in which it is utterly impossible for any administration, or any minister, to pursue his particular policy, however convinced he may be in his own mind, or however resolved he may be, if the great body of the people who have placed him in power do not actively maintain him there. I do not say, gentlemen, that this is a healthy state of the social system. I do not mean to tell you that governing a country out of the Government is what, abstractedly, I approve of. It is not either the Conservatives or the Tories; it is not either Sir Robert Peel or the Duke of Wellington, that commenced agitation in this country; but the moment you permitted that fatal principle<sup>1</sup> to be introduced practically into your constitution, it became necessary, according to the old principle of Mr. Burke, that ‘when your opponents conspired, you were called upon to combine.’

Gentlemen, this is the position of Sir Robert Peel in the House of Commons. Sir Robert Peel, I believe, is influenced by a desire of practically mediating between great contending parties. I believe he has adopted opinions which are just and right, and that he is anxious to support native industry; but, at the same time, if native industry will not support Sir Robert Peel, how is he to go on? That is the precise position of the minister at this day, with an apparently feeble Parliamentary minority before him, but consisting of men of great intellectual ability, and with the classic temple of the classic drama,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Coningsby*, book iv. chap. 10.



hired at two hundred pounds a night, to represent the character of the House of Commons to the population behind them. How is any cabinet in the world, whatever may be their *calm opinion* of the policy they ought to pursue, if that policy is, as it ought to be, an unimpassioned, an impartial, a moderate, and an eminently salutary policy—how are they to pursue it, if bodies of men do not unite out of the House to let them know that the party which put them into power to preserve the institutions and interests of the country (*let me remind you of that*) are now prepared, under all circumstances, as they were then, giving them an ample allowance for circumstances, to support them so long as they adhere to principle.

I never will commit myself upon this great question to petty economical details; I will not pledge myself to miserable questions of 6*d.* in 7*s.* 6*d.* or 8*s.* of duties about corn; I do not care whether your corn sells for this sum or that, or whether it is under a sliding scale or a fixed duty; but what I want, and what I wish to secure, and what, as far as my energies go, I will secure, is, the preponderance of the landed interest. Gentlemen, when I talk of the preponderance of the landed interest, do not for a moment suppose that I mean merely the preponderance of ‘squires of high degree,’ that, in fact, I am thinking only of justices of the peace. My thought wanders farther than a lordly tower or a manorial hall. I am looking in that phrase, in using that very phrase, to what I consider the vast majority of the English nation. I do not undervalue the mere superiority of the landed classes; on the contrary, I think it a most necessary element of political power and national civilisation; but I am looking to the population of our innumerable villages, to the crowds in our rural towns: aye, and I mean even something more than that by the landed interest—I mean that estate of the poor which, in my opinion, has been already tampered with, dangerously tampered with; which, I have also said, let me remind you, in other places besides Shrewsbury. I mean by the estate of the poor, the great estate of the Church, which has, before this time, secured our liberty, and may, for aught I know, still secure our civilisation. I mean, also, by the landed interest, that great judicial fabric,

that great building up of our laws and manners which is, in fact, the ancient polity of the realm, and the ancient constitution of the realm—those ancient institutions which we Conservatives are bound to uphold—which you sent us to Parliament to uphold; for there is not a greater, or a more general, there is not a more prevalent or a more superficial error of misconception, than to suppose that the English constitution only consists of Queen, Lords, and Commons. Why, gentlemen, that is only a part, and not even the most important part, of the constitution of England. Your trial by jury is as important a part, and it is also an institution of England. Your institution of trial by jury arises out of your landed tenure of property. And if you, because commerce is declining, forsooth, because gentlemen hire theatres, make tawdry speeches in tawdry places, and say that the spirit of the age is against the territorial and feudal system, and declare that it is all the consequence of the remains of that old system—if you, upon this account, uproot that tenure of property; if you destroy all those institutions; if you destroy all those manners and duties which only are supported by this species of property—which you will do if you have a great territorial revolution in this country (for I will show you that if you have any change it will soon lead to much change)—I want to know what will become of your institutions? Institutions! Why, gentlemen, anybody can have a King, Lords, and Commons. In my lifetime twenty-five States in Europe and America have made themselves Kings, Lords, and Commons. You may take a hundred gentlemen, and call them dukes, earls, and lords, and shut them up in a room; you may take 300 other gentlemen, and make them deputies—that is, you may give them the name; but do you think that an ancient, powerful, enlightened, and intellectual nation will consent to be governed by those men? No; they would rather submit to be governed by two select vestries.

What do you think, gentlemen, makes the people of England submit to have their fortunes, or, it may be, their lives, decided by the votes of such men as the Earl of Powis, and Lord Forester, and other persons like them in this country? Is it

because they are individuals against whom no fault has ever been heard, for any single or isolated act, that you leave your characters and fortunes to be decided by them? Not at all; but it is the great sympathy which proceeds from the fact that they have some stake in the realm, and which makes everyone feel these men have Shropshire at their back. Why, they represent Shropshire as much as I represent Shrewsbury. They are as much the representatives of Shropshire in the House of Lords as their sons, nephews, or friends may be the representatives of constituencies in the House of Commons; and it is because there is throughout our constitution, as it were, a territorial bias, that there exists throughout the country a similar bond of sympathy. Two members are not sent up to a distant city, three hundred miles from the constituency they represent, for no purpose; on the contrary, we all feel that the members sent up represent the property, and by the property I mean the traditionary rights and duties of the property of this country.

Gentlemen, we hear a great deal in the present day upon the subject of the feudal system. I have heard from the lips of Mr. Cobden—no, I have not heard him say it, as I was not present to hear the celebrated speech he made in Drury Lane Theatre—but we have all heard how Mr. Cobden, who is a very eminent person, has said, in a very memorable speech, that England was the victim of the feudal system, and we have all heard how he has spoken of the barbarism of the feudal system, and of the barbarous relics of the feudal system. Now, if we have any relics of the feudal system, I regret that not more of it is remaining. Think one moment—and it is well you should be reminded of what this is, because there is no phrase more glibly used in the present day than ‘the barbarism of the feudal system.’ Now, what is the fundamental principle of the feudal system, gentlemen? It is that the tenure of all property shall be the performance of its duties. Why, when the Conqueror carved out parts of the land, and introduced the feudal system, he said to the recipient, ‘You shall have that estate, but you shall do something for it: you shall feed the poor; you shall endow the Church; you shall defend the land in

case of war; and you shall execute justice and maintain truth to the poor for nothing.’<sup>1</sup>

It is all very well to talk of the barbarities of the feudal system, and to tell us that in those days when it flourished a great variety of gross and grotesque circumstances and great miseries occurred; but these were not the result of the feudal system: they were the result of the barbarism of the age. They existed not from the feudal system, but in spite of the feudal system. The principle of the feudal system, the principle which was practically operated upon, was the noblest principle, the grandest, the most magnificent and benevolent that was ever conceived by sage, or ever practised by patriot. Why, when I hear a political economist, or an Anti-Corn-Law Leaguer, or some conceited Liberal reviewer come forward and tell us, as a grand discovery of modern science, twitting and taunting, perhaps, some unhappy squire who cannot respond to the alleged discovery—when I hear them say, as the great discovery of modern science, that ‘Property has its duties as well as its rights,’ my answer is that that is but a feeble plagiarism of the very principle of that feudal system which you are always reviling. Let

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to compare with this passage the following words of Mr. Gladstone, spoken twenty-seven years afterwards: ‘In Ireland, from the unhappy circumstances of the country, . . . there has not rested in the hands of the landlords the discharge of that immense mass of public duties, bearing upon every subject of political, social, and moral interest, without fee or reward, which has honourably distinguished for so many generations the landlords of England. This fixed and happy usage I take to be a just relic and true descendant of the feudal system, which never took a real or genuine root in Ireland. . . . Are you prepared to denude them (the Irish landlords) of their interest in the land? and, what is more, are you prepared to absolve them from their duties with regard to the land? I, for one, confess that I am not; nor is that the sentiment of my colleagues. We think, on the contrary, that we ought to look forward with hope and expectation to bringing about a state of things in which the landlords of Ireland may assume, or may more generally assume, the position which is happily held as a class by landlords in this country—a position marked by residence, by personal familiarity, and by sympathy with the people among whom they live, by long traditional connection handed on from generation to generation, and marked by a constant discharge of duty in every form that can be suggested—be it as to the administration of justice, be it as to the defence of the country, be it as to the supply of social, or spiritual, or moral, or educational wants; be it for any purpose whatever that is recognised as good or beneficial in a civilised society.’—House of Commons, February 17, 1870: Speech on Irish Land Act.

me next tell those gentlemen who are so fond of telling us that property has its duties as well as its rights, that labour also has its rights as well as its duties: and when I see masses of property raised in this country which do not recognise that principle; when I find men making fortunes by a method which permits them (very often in a very few years) to purchase the lands of the old territorial aristocracy of the country, I cannot help remembering that those millions are accumulated by a mode which does not recognise it as a duty 'to endow the Church, to feed the poor, to guard the land, and to execute justice for nothing.' And I cannot help asking myself, when I hear of all this misery, and of all this suffering; when I know that evidence exists in our Parliament of a state of demoralisation in the once happy population of this land, which is not equalled in the most barbarous countries, which we suppose the more rude and uncivilised in Asia are—I cannot help suspecting that this has arisen because property has been permitted to be created and held without the performance of its duties.

Now, I want to ask the gentlemen who are members of the Anti-Corn-Law League, the gentlemen who are pressing on the Government of the country, on the present occasion, the total repeal and abolition of the Corn Laws—I want to know whether they have soberly considered how far they are personally responsible for this degraded state of our population. And I want them to consider this most important point, which has never yet been properly brought before any deliberative assembly—how far the present law of succession and inheritance in land will survive the whole change of your agricultural policy? If that does not survive—if that falls—if we recur to the Continental system of parcelling out landed estates—I want to know how long you can maintain the political system of the country? That estate of the Church which I mentioned; that estate of the poor to which I referred; that great fabric of judicial rights to which I made allusion; those traditionary manners and associations which spring out of the land, which form the national character, which form part of the possession of the poor not to be despised, and which is one of the most important elements of political power—they will tell you 'Let it

go!’ My answer to that is, ‘If it goes, it is a revolution, a great, a destructive revolution,’ and it is not my taste to live in an age of destructive revolution. For these reasons, gentlemen, I believe in that respect, faithfully representing your sentiments, that I have always upheld that law which, I think, will uphold and maintain the preponderance of the agricultural interests of the country. I do not wish to conceal the ground upon which I wish to uphold it. I never attempted to uphold it by talking of the peculiar burthens, which, however, I believe, may be legitimately proved, or indulging in many of those arguments in favour of the Corn Laws which may or may not be sound, but which are always brought forward with a sort of hesitating consciousness which may be assumed to be connected with futility. I take the only broad and only safe line—namely, that what we ought to uphold is, the preponderance of the landed interest; that the preponderance of the landed interest has made England; that it is an immense element of political power and stability; that we should never have been able to undertake the great war in which we embarked in the memory of many present—that we could never have been able to conquer the greatest military genius the world ever saw, with the greatest means at his disposal, and to hurl him from his throne, if we had not had a territorial aristocracy to give stability to our constitution.

And I mean to say this, that if we had not done that, if we had not had that territorial power, and that preponderance of the land-owner in our constitution, I do not see why Great Britain, probably very contented and very prosperous, should have been a greater power than Denmark or Sweden; but I for one am not prepared to sit under the power of a third-class if I can be a citizen of a first-class Empire. And I do not believe that any man who listens to me can differ with me upon that point. It is enough that you were born in Shropshire, that you are a portion of that ancient county, that you were born in a county full of historical recollections, a county that has taken the lead of all others in public affairs, a county where, as Lord Clarendon says, ‘the Cavaliers’ blood lives.’ It is enough that you have undergone great vicissitudes; it is enough that you

have lived under various dynasties ; it is enough that you have sprung from a race that has done something ; it is enough that you can talk of your ancestors as of a people that can be remembered—it is enough to know all this in order to feel that you do not want to be put in the catalogue of new States which may hereafter turn out something or may not—in fact, to feel that you do not want to be turned into a sort of spinning-jenny machine kind of nation. You want, in fact, to *be* a great people, because you *are* a great people, and because you feel that the exertions of your fathers and your own aspirations entitle you to that position : and it seems to be a reasonable ambition.

Before I sit down I do not wish to close without an observation on those who are always finding fault with the humbler classes of the community—who at the same time charitably say they are not responsible for their deterioration. I confess that, as far as I can form an opinion, the deterioration of society is not to be found only among the labourers of the country. It is not in the squalid dwellings ; it is not in the miserable details of sickening poverty, that this deterioration may be found ; but, in my opinion, that heroic nobility which formed this country, and that spirited gentry which has so often come forward to vindicate our rights or to defend our liberties, and which have also been the main source of our commercial greatness—for it is the nobility and gentry of the land who have founded our greatest colonies—in my opinion the present race is deficient in those qualities.<sup>1</sup> There are, however, great exceptions to be made, even in the higher classes of the country ; but there is a miserable philosophy of the day which ascribes everything to ‘the spirit of the age’—that thinks nothing is to be done by the influence of individual character, which is, after all, the only inducement to great actions, the only spur to great achievements. That opinion is much too prevalent ; and there is no question that it is not merely among the lower classes that we find a lack of those great qualities which hitherto have always been associated with the noble, national character of England.

<sup>1</sup> But not the then rising generation. Cf. *Syllabus*, book v. chap. 2.

I told you when I saw you first that I should maintain, so far as my vote could maintain, the preponderance of the landed interest. I am of that opinion still. I believe the landed interest should be the basis of our political and social system. But if there be others who are of a different opinion, if it be—which I do not believe—that there are those of a different opinion in high places, and that these alterations may be brought forward, and perhaps even passed, do not let us for a moment disguise from ourselves the influence which such an event must have, I will not say upon the political power, or social condition, or financial prosperity of the country, for these are great themes, but upon the more limited but most interesting topic of the construction of parties. Rest assured, if these changes are brought forward, whoever may be the person to propose them, that we are on the eve of an age of great party convulsion—that we are on the eve of an age when we shall see no more permanent Governments,<sup>1</sup> no more strong Governments, no more administrations carrying out from long and patient experience and conviction the remedies of the faults of their predecessors. Then let me tell you that, in that time, they who look for benefit from the hands of public men, or look to the favour of Courts, or the confidence of ministers, will build upon a rock of sand. No public man at that time will be in a position in which he can pursue his career who has not the power to cast his anchor deep in the rock of some great constitutional constituency. As for myself, if that happens, I shall come to you and tell you, ‘I am here; we are beaten; but I have done my duty. Remember what I told you when we met in the Music Hall at Shrewsbury in 1843; I told you what might happen; I told you I did not believe it would occur, but that if it did occur I was prepared to act; I told you then that I had elected to support that cause which I believe upholds the power and prosperity of my country, and the social happiness of all classes. Others have thought differently; the majority, perhaps the enlightened majority, animated by that “spirit of the age” which hitherto we have seen,

<sup>1</sup> The experience of the last few years invests these words with peculiar interest and significance.



have thought differently, and have had the power to act differently.'

But I have still some confidence in the national character of Englishmen. I know well that before this, the country has experienced great vicissitudes. I know well that we had in England more revolutions, and upon a greater scale, than in any other country in the world. It is utterly impossible, indeed, for the French Revolution, or any other, to embrace more comprehensive objects. You have had the majesty of England brought to the block; you have had the Church, personified by Archbishop Laud, brought to the block; you have had the administration, in the person of Strafford, brought to the block—the king, the minister, and the archbishop. You have had the House of Lords voted a nuisance. You have had the House of Commons kicked out in an ignominious manner by a military officer. You have had the Church completely sequestered. All this has happened in England. But before a quarter of a century passed over, you returned to your old laws, your old habits, your old traditions, your old convictions. In 1648 Oliver Cromwell slept at Whitehall; in 1688<sup>1</sup> Charles II. followed his example. And shall I tell you the reason why, after circumstances so wonderful, though no historian has noticed it; though you saw every trace of the social system uprooted by the most prejudicial, grasping, and subtle enemies that were ever invented;<sup>2</sup> though the vessel became a wreck, and the king, the Church, and the constitution were swept away, the nation returned to itself? Shall I tell you how it was that the nation returned to itself, and Old England, after the deluge, was seen rising above the waters? This was the reason—because during all that fearful revolution you never changed the tenure of your landed property. That, I think, gentlemen, proves my case; and if we have baffled a wit like Oliver Cromwell, let us not be staggered even before Mr. Cobden! The acres remained; the estates remained. The generations changed: the Puritan father died, and the Cavalier son came into his place, and.

<sup>1</sup> Presumably 1660.

<sup>2</sup> The reports of the speech differ so much in different papers, and all of them are so corrupt, that emendation becomes a hopeless task.

backed by that power and influence, the nation reverted to the ancient principles of the realm. And this, gentlemen, is the reason why you have seen an outcry raised against your Corn Laws. Your Corn Laws are merely the outwork of a great system fixed and established upon your territorial property, and the only object the Leaguers have in making themselves masters of the outwork is that they may easily overcome the citadel.

SUGAR DUTIES, June 17, 1844.<sup>1</sup>

[In the second volume, among the speeches on Ireland will be found (August 9, 1843) the first open declaration of hostility against Sir Robert Peel's Government, together with the complimentary remarks of both the 'Times' and 'Morning Chronicle' on the young Tory party who followed Mr. Disraeli and had just acquired the title of Young England. Mr. Disraeli now follows up the blow. He had supported the Corn Bill and the new Tariff of 1842. But he was obliged to oppose Sir Robert twice during the session of 1844: once on the Factory question, when ministers were first beaten on a motion of Lord Ashley's, and afterwards compelled the House to rescind its vote; and secondly on the Sugar Duties, on an amendment proposed by Mr. Miles, when the same change of front was executed. Mr. Disraeli complains of the imperious tone adopted by Sir Robert Peel and thinks if he had assumed a more conciliatory manner he might have encountered less resistance.

In this speech Mr. Disraeli anticipates what he said at Shrewsbury in the following August. The House of Commons was called on by Sir Robert Peel to rescind its vote, and he now protests against the sound of the lash which was never silent on the Treasury Bench.]

**MR. DISRAELI:** Sir, I was not present during the eventful debate of the other night; and therefore, not having heard of the movement that has been made, nor of 'the conspiracy' that has been entered into, I own I am not without astonishment at what has transpired. I was not a little lost in wonder when I heard it said on Saturday and to-day—on the authority, as it would seem, of persons who had grounds for disseminating the report—that we were to come down to the House this afternoon to witness the resignation of the right honourable baronet at the head of the Government. I con-

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard,

gratulate the ministry—of course I congratulate the country—that instead of resigning an administration, the right honourable gentleman has only moved an amendment. Sir, there has been an allusion to a case which is said to be analogous to the present—the case I mean, of Lord Althorp, who, when Chancellor of the Exchequer, asked the House to reconsider a vote it had come to on the subject of the Malt Tax. I was not in the House at the time; but I have read and heard of the proceeding, and I know that it was held by men of both sides to be a remarkable case—a case the occurrence of which was attributed to the inexperience of a reconstructed assembly, and of gentlemen not very learned in the ways of Parliament. The vote on this occasion was generally felt, I believe, to be inevitable; but, at the same time, it was felt to be a vote that was distressing, if not damaging to the character of all parties in the House; and it was a vote, I believe, which the members of both the Government and the Opposition felt to be only justified by the extremest exigency. Several years have elapsed since that case occurred. It was left for the era of the present ‘Conservative’ administration—it was left for our own experience to witness a state of public affairs only too analogous. Twice within the present session have the ministry been driven to resort to the precedent of this ‘case of extreme urgency.’ About a month ago this House was called upon to rescind a resolution on a subject of the deepest interest to the great body of the nation: and for the first time since the Malt Tax vote, this House submitted to that process which was previously regarded with so much distrust and only submitted to from such overbearing necessity.

I cannot help thinking, Sir, that some mysterious influence must be at work to place us, within a month, in precisely the same position, and to put us before the country under circumstances which I believe no one in this House, whether he be on this side or the Opposition side, can describe as other than degrading. It may be that the right honourable gentleman will retain power by subjecting us to this stern process; but I should mistake the right honourable gentleman’s character if I were to suppose that he could greatly value a power which is only to be

maintained by means so extraordinary—I doubt whether I may not say, by means so unconstitutional. I think the right honourable gentleman should deign to consult a little more the feelings of his supporters. I do not think he ought to drag them unreasonably through the mire. He has already once this session made them repeal a solemn decision at which they had arrived, and now he comes down again and says, ‘Unless you rescind another important resolution, I will no longer take upon myself the responsibility of conducting affairs.’ Now, I really think to rescind one vote during the session is enough: I don’t think in reason we ought to be called to endure this degradation more than once a year. That should be prevented. The right honourable baronet should introduce some Parliamentary tariff for the regulation of our disapproval. The Government ought to tell us to what point we might go—thus far, and no farther; there are the bounds within which you are to enjoy your Parliamentary independence, but the moment you pass them, you must submit to public disgrace, or we must submit to private life. Now, this is not the most agreeable way of conducting the affairs of the country; it is not the most constitutional. I remember in 1841, when the right honourable baronet supported the motion of the noble lord the member for Liverpool, he used these words. He said, ‘I have never joined in the anti-slavery cry, and now I will not join in the cry of cheap sugar.’ Two years have elapsed, and the right honourable gentleman has joined in the anti-slavery cry and has adopted the cry of cheap sugar. But it seems that the right honourable baronet’s horror of slavery extends to every place except the benches behind him. There the gang is still assembled, and there the thong of the whip still sounds. Whatever may be the anti-slavery repugnance of the right honourable gentleman, his distaste would seem not to extend to this House. If the whip were more sparing here, his conduct would be more consistent with his professions.

After the vote of the other night became known and its consequences were in some degree contemplated, there were various rumours in circulation that the ministry had resigned, and these reports I certainly cannot but consider proceeded

from some who were authorised to circulate them; but it now appears from the right honourable gentleman's declaration that it is not he or his colleagues who are to resign their offices, but we, the majority of the House of Commons, who are to resign our votes, and the country at large is to see the representatives of the people again disgraced as they were on a former occasion during the present session. That is the point to which I think it important to direct attention. We are called upon to rescind our votes a second time; and, more than this, we are called upon to do so under circumstances so peculiar that no man whatever can entertain a doubt as to the personal distress and even disgrace which will be entailed upon him by his participation in such a proceeding. It will be the better for the House, Sir, and far better for the right honourable gentleman at the head of Her Majesty's Government, that such a system as this should no longer prevail. I say that the right honourable gentleman is deserving of a far better position in the eye of the country than one which he can only maintain by menacing his friends and by using the arts of persuasion with his opponents. The right honourable gentleman menaces us, and deals out threats to keep us to our allegiance with him; whilst he lavishes those arts of persuasion for which he has acquired so just a celebrity upon those who form what he has chosen to term a combination, if not a conspiracy, against him. The right honourable gentleman came into power upon the strength of our votes, but he would rely for the permanence of his ministry upon his political opponents. He may be right, he may even be to a certain degree successful, in pursuing the line of conduct which he has adopted, menacing his friends and cringing to his opponents, but I for one am disposed to look upon it as a success neither tending to the honour of the House nor to his own credit. I, therefore, for one must be excused if I declare my determination to give my vote upon this occasion as I did in the former instance: and as I do not follow the example of the honourable and gallant member near me (Sir H. Douglas), it will not subject me to the imputation of having voted upon the former occasion without thought or purpose. It only remains for me to declare,

OPENING OF LETTERS, Feb. 28, 1845.<sup>1</sup>

[This is a continuation of the same complaint, the complaint of Sir Robert Peel's language and demeanour towards the independent section of his followers: a complaint which was endorsed not only by the Opposition newspapers, but still more decidedly by the 'Times' on the occasion to which I have already referred. The question arose in the previous year, in consequence of a petition presented by Mr. Duncombe from Mazzini and others complaining that their letters had been opened at the General Post Office. A committee of inquiry was appointed. But their report was considered so unsatisfactory that on the meeting of Parliament in 1845 Mr. Duncombe moved for another. The motion was defeated by a large majority, and he then moved for the production of certain Post Office books and was again defeated. On each occasion he was supported by Mr. Disraeli, who in the second of his two speeches illustrated the conduct of Sir Robert Peel in relation to the agricultural interest by an image which has now become historical. It may seem at first sight perhaps that there is little in common between free trade and the opening of private letters. But Mr. Disraeli was complaining of Sir Robert's demeanour towards the more independent members of his own party, and thus was able to introduce his sarcasm in an apostrophe which did not seem irrelevant.]

**MR. DISRAELI:** Sir, the honourable member for Finsbury has brought before the House his proposition in an intelligible shape. He has laid before the House the statement of a personal grievance, and he has distinctly affirmed to us that in making that statement he makes no personal attack upon any individual. Sir, I should have hardly thought that it was necessary to make that declaration, had it not been for the associations connected with this motion, which perhaps origin-

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.





have done so upon the warrant of a minister.' If they have done so, let them produce the warrant, he will then be in a position to appeal to the House and the country for the vindication of his character, or to the courts of law, to decide whether that warrant is a legal instrument or not.

Sir, I am at a loss to comprehend what answer can be given to that direct appeal. This is the view naturally taken by the honourable gentleman in his individual case. He feels the individual grievance—he naturally looks to the individual remedy. All that he wants is the warrant. All that he wants is an opportunity of vindicating his innocence, or allowing others to prove his guilt. I believe that the country requires more. I believe that the country is anxious that the warrant should be produced—not merely that it should vindicate the honour and conduct of the honourable gentleman, or the reverse; but that an opportunity should be afforded to the subjects of the Queen to say whether that instrument is a legal one; and how is it possible for any person to have that opportunity unless the House interferes, as it is requested in the present instance? It is not asked to exercise its prerogative and privilege to vindicate any gentleman who cannot vindicate himself by law. The situation of the honourable gentleman is that which may be the situation of any member of this House, of any subject of the Queen, to-morrow. It is exactly this, 'Will you put me in a position worse than the meanest subject of the realm is placed in? Will you say that I have experienced a wrong and that I have not a remedy?' Now, Sir, that is the question, I believe, in which the country is interested. That it is also interested in the question whether this power should be exercised under any circumstances, no one can doubt. Some gentlemen may rise and say that this is a power that ought always to be at the disposition of Government; some may say that it is disgraceful to this country that foreign nations should know we exercise it; and others may rise and state that that can hardly be the case, since every foreign nation does itself exercise it; but there is this distinction—though foreign nations always do exercise this power, foreign nations never believed that England did. It

resolves itself into this question—are you content to be ruled by a popular government, or do you wish to be ruled by a government of police? No doubt a popular government has many inconveniences. No doubt it would be much better that the question of the Sugar Duties, for instance, should be settled without any loss of time. It is a great inconvenience to trade, as the right honourable gentleman (Sir Robert Peel) has often told us, that there should be any discussion on the subject. I don't doubt that if the question were settled by the right honourable gentleman himself, in his cabinet, it would be equally well, perhaps better. This is one of the inconveniences we endure for popular government, and so it is with reference to the correspondence of individuals. You have a popular government, you have a strong local system; you may by not prying into the correspondence of individuals be subjected to great calamities. You may have Bristol burnt, as Bristol was burnt; you may have Birmingham assailed, as you had it assailed. But the country strikes the balance. It agrees to suffer those great injuries for the sake of a popular government, instead of a government of police; and the country, after all, must decide it.

Now, Sir, I believe that is the impartial view as regards the general question. As regards the country, though sympathising with the honourable gentleman who presses the case of his individual wrong, they desire also an opportunity to decide whether this warrant of the Secretary of State is a legal warrant. They wish to have it decided as the question of general warrants was decided; and if it be a legal warrant, then it becomes an open question fit for discussion, whether such a power should be allowed in a free country to subsist. Sir, the honourable gentleman who has introduced the question to-night seems, in some remarks he has made, to think that an impartial discussion of the question is impossible in this House. Certainly, when I recollect the last debate, to which I need not refer, I am not surprised, from the elaborate misconception of former debates, that the honourable gentleman should fear this discussion should not be free. But I cannot believe, although the honourable gentleman fears, that any intimidation is put-

posely enacted in this House; but there is not the slightest doubt that on both occasions now before us, and upon others which have occurred within the last two or three years, there have been misunderstandings, founded on the misconceptions—perhaps mutual misconceptions—of the relations that subsist between the leader of a party and the supporters of a party. Sir, I may allude to these circumstances, because the honourable gentleman seems to think that on this occasion he is not secure of a fair discussion of this question; and because, unless there is a correct understanding on this head, I almost despair of his receiving that fair discussion. When the balanced state of parties ceased in this House, it must have been pretty evident to those who had any idea of the constituent elements of such an assembly, that what we call party feeling, though for a short time from custom preserved, would eventually evaporate. There were very few, if any, party questions, and it was pretty clear that in a popular assembly of more than six hundred persons, questions would constantly arise in which gentlemen, though sitting on different sides of the House, without compromising the elementary principles of their politics, would very often divide in the same lobby, and very often in discussions take the same side. An honourable gentleman on the other side gets up and proposes a motion which, at the first blush, does not seem to call in question any of the marked principles of either party—if two parties, indeed, still exist. Some gentleman on this side thinks it a legitimate opportunity to express his opinions on the question; he happens to support the motion: the Government barely attend to the debate—treat it, perhaps, with indifference or carelessness; the debate trails on; comes into a second night; certain circumstances occur which portend a division, which, I will not say, might be embarrassing—that would be impossible—but disagreeable to the Government. Immediately this takes place, a certain system is brought into play which may prevent, perhaps, that fair discussion the honourable gentleman would seem to despair of, and which I can hardly believe can long be permitted to subsist in this House.

Sir, it seems to me that the system is established on

two principles, or rather processes—innuendo and imputation—the insinuation of base motive, and the allegation of factious conduct. Generally it develops itself in this manner. There are some indications of irritability on the Treasury Bench, almost immediately followed by some impatience among the immediate adherents of the Government; and then, as I have observed in several debates, some gentleman gets up—an avowed adherent, or perhaps a secret supporter of the Government—and instantly we have imputations<sup>1</sup> of mean motives—of personal motives—I should say, of corrupt motives—against every gentleman who is perhaps speaking, or about to vote, in opposition to the Government, although the question may not be one that involves any party principle, or any decided principle whatever—a mere matter of practice and detail. Now, Sir, in this state of affairs, probably at the end of the second or third night of debate, when a course so injurious has naturally produced acerbity in many quarters, perhaps expressions of that bitterness, the sincerity of which is not to be doubted, then at the right moment the right honourable gentleman (Sir Robert Peel) rises to cap the climax, and, probably having just been assured by one of his aides-de-camp that he is secure of a greater majority than ever, he makes a passionate appeal to his supporters, as if the strong Government were in the very throes of dissolution, and uses language which, in my opinion, is susceptible only of one interpretation—that some gentleman on this side of the House would, to embarrass the Government, descend to political collusion and Parliamentary intrigue. Now, Sir, I protest against the system. The system is not founded in justice or fair play. It is not founded upon a real understanding

<sup>1</sup> When Mr. Disraeli first spoke against Sir Robert Peel on August 9, 1843, in condemnation of his Irish policy, the 'Morning Herald' published a leading article in which appeared the following sentence:—

'We regret to express a harsh opinion of Mr. Disraeli, but a perusal and reperusal of his speech has left on our minds a very strong impression that it was the result of personal disappointment rather than of strong conviction, and that had Mr. Disraeli been made President of the Board of Trade, it is more than probable he would have found in Sir Robert Peel "the great minister" he sighs after.'

Such, however, was not the view taken of his conduct by the leading journal, an independent supporter of Sir Robert, nor yet by the 'Morning Chronicle.'

of the principles on which party connections should exist. It is, in fact, a system of tyranny, and as degrading to those who exercise it as to those who endure it.

I take a recent case, because fresh in our memory. When the honourable gentleman (Mr. Duncombe) the other night called our attention to the instance of his grievance, he brought forward a motion which on the face of it everyone must see would be opposed by the Government which exists, and the Government that preceded them. It was, therefore, taken out of the category of party questions. There was a general impression in the House that it was extremely desirable that the decision of the Committee should be supported. That impression was not peculiar to this side of the House. An honourable gentleman, the member for Hull (Sir. J. Hanmer), the independence of whose character is, I believe, universally acknowledged, who is certainly as incapable of political intrigue as any gentleman in the House, spoke in the debate without concert or combination, forming his opinion merely on the statement of the honourable member for Finsbury, and being himself particularly inclined to support the decision of the Committee; but he thought it was impossible that this individual instance of the honourable member could be passed over. He expressed his opinion in a frank, manly manner.

It so happened, as probably it will often happen in a popular assembly of this kind, that circumstances during the debate changed to that degree that there was a chance of a division, not embarrassing, but probably more disagreeable to the Government than they at first anticipated, if they condescended to think of a division in the first instance. Well, immediately all the powers of the system were put into action. The right honourable gentleman was brought forward to sanction it by his great example. The division is called for. Gentlemen are brought up from the country to support an endangered Government that never was in peril, and gain a great party triumph when there was not a single party principle at stake, not a single party principle in danger. Now, Sir, I really think there ought to be a more liberal sense of party connection than that which the Treasury Bench at this moment recognises; and I

think the right honourable gentleman at the head of the Government is the last minister who should assume to be a political martinet. I can conceive a minister in a position in which he requires devotion from his party; I can suppose a minister having a very small majority; I can suppose he holds power merely in deference to the wishes of his party; he has a right to say to his supporters, 'I have to fight a very difficult game; I would much rather give up power; still I hold on; but you must be ready at all times to support me with devotion.' That is not the position of the right honourable gentleman. His position is quite the reverse. He has a very large party to support him, and an Opposition before him which, though distinguished doubtless by very eminent talents, and numerically far from contemptible, is not, nevertheless, distinguished for its power of cohesion. The right honourable gentleman is in a position which really would allow him to be indulgent. It is very easy for him to turn round and say, 'What can be more treacherous than this—to be attacked<sup>1</sup> on the right flank? I am prepared to meet the foe before me; no one ever saw me quail.' The right honourable gentleman forgets that the foe before him never wished to fight him. He may sometimes be assailed on his right flank, but while he boasts of his courage and determination to conquer, the right honourable gentleman forgets that the victory is very easy when nobody opposes him.

There is another reason why he should not adopt this tone—he should not forget that, after all, a great many of his supporters were elected on the hustings under very different circumstances to those under which they sit here. Really a little philosophical consideration from so great a statesman under such circumstances is the least we might expect. I admit that I for one was sent here by my constituents to sit on this side. He may object to me, although I think he has no great occasion to object, that I am sometimes in a different lobby to himself; but I was sent to swell a Tory majority—to support a Tory ministry. Whether a Tory ministry exists or not I do not pretend to decide; but I am bound to believe that

<sup>1</sup> Sir Robert in a previous speech had complained of being assailed on the flank.

the Tory majority still remains, and therefore I do not think that it is the majority that should cross the House, but only the ministry. I hope that the right honourable gentleman, on reflection, will take a more condescending and charitable view of our conduct than he has hitherto been pleased to do. I am sure myself I never misinterpret the conduct of the right honourable gentleman. I know that there are some who think that he is looking out for new allies. I never believed anything of the kind. The position of the right honourable gentleman is clear and precise. I do not believe he is looking to any coalition, although many of my constituents do. The right honourable gentleman has only to remain exactly where he is. The right honourable gentleman caught the Whigs bathing, and walked away with their clothes.<sup>1</sup> He has left them in the full enjoyment of their liberal position, and he is himself a strict conservative of their garments. I cannot conceive that the right honourable gentleman will ever desert his party; they seem never to desert him. There never was a man yet who has less need to find new friends. I, therefore, hope all these rumours will cease. I look on the right honourable gentleman

<sup>1</sup> There is a fable in the fifth volume of the *Craftsman*, called 'Truth and Falsehood,' in which occurs the following passage, which may or may not have suggested the above illustration:—

Once on a time, in sunshine weather,  
Falsehood and Truth walked out together,  
The neighbouring woods and lawns to view,  
As opposites will sometimes do.  
Through many a blooming mead they pass'd,  
And at a brook arrived at last.  
At length quoth Falsehood, 'Sister Truth,'  
(For so she called her from her youth,)  
'What if, to shun yon sultry beam,  
We bathe in this delightful stream;  
The bottom smooth, the water clear,  
And there's no prying shepherd near?'  
'With all my heart,' the nymph replied,  
And threw her snowy robe aside,  
Stript herself naked to the skin,  
And with a spring leapt headlong in.  
Falsehood more leisurely undress'd  
And, laying by her tawdry vest,  
Tricked herself out in Truth's array,  
And cross the meadows tript away.

as a man who has tamed the shrew of Liberalism by her own tactics. He is the political Petruchio, who has outbid you all. If we could only induce the right honourable gentleman, therefore, to take a larger or more liberal view of his Parliamentary position than he seems to adopt in moments too testy for so great a man to indulge in, he would spare us some imputations which I assure him are really painful. If the right honourable gentleman may find it sometimes convenient to reprove a supporter on his right flank,<sup>1</sup> perhaps we deserve it—I, for one, am quite prepared to bow to the rod; but really, if the right honourable gentleman, instead of having recourse to obloquy, would only stick to quotation, he may rely on it it would be a safer weapon. It is one he always wields with the hand of a master; and when he does appeal to any authority, in prose or verse, he is sure to be successful, partly because he seldom quotes a passage that has not previously received the meed of Parliamentary approbation, and partly and principally because his quotations are so happy. The right honourable gentleman knows what the introduction of a great name does in debate, how important is its effect, and occasionally how electrical. He never refers to any author who is not great, and sometimes loved—Canning, for example. That is a name never to be mentioned, I am sure, in the House of Commons without emotion. We all admire his genius; we all, at least most of us, deplore his untimely end; and we all sympathise with him in his fierce struggle with supreme prejudice and sublime mediocrity, with inveterate foes and with —‘candid friends.’ The right honourable gentleman may be sure that a quotation

<sup>1</sup> To understand the conclusion of the speech, it is necessary to bear in mind the course which the debate had taken. On February 10, Mr. Duncombe moved for his committee. On the 21st, Lord Howick moved an amendment, which was seconded by Mr. Disraeli, in reply to whom Sir Robert Peel quoted the well-known lines of Canning:

Give me the avowed, the erect, the manly foe,  
Firm I can meet, perhaps may turn, the blow;  
But of all plagues, good heaven, thy wrath can send,  
Save me, oh save me, from a candid friend.

The amendment was defeated by 240 votes to 145; but on the 26th Mr. Duncombe returned to the charge, when Mr. Disraeli delivered the above speech.



from such an authority will always tell. Some lines, for example, upon friendship, written by Mr. Canning, and quoted by the right honourable gentleman! The theme, the poet, the speaker—what a felicitious combination! Its effect in debate must be overwhelming; and I am sure, were it addressed to me, all that would remain for me would be thus publicly to congratulate the right honourable gentleman, not only on his ready memory, but on his courageous conscience.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> That is, on his having the courage to apply the words of Canning to Mr. Disraeli's treatment of himself when his conscience must tell him how much more applicable they were to his own treatment of Mr. Canning. I am offering no opinion on the merits of this controversy: I only wish to make clear the meaning of the text. Sir Robert said, in reply, that if Mr. Disraeli had wished to withdraw his confidence from him on account of his relations with Mr. Canning, he need not have waited for him to make that quotation; an answer which can hardly be described as crushing or terrific, the epithets bestowed on it by his admirers.

AGRICULTURAL DISTRESS, March 17, 1845.<sup>1</sup>

[On motion of Mr. Miles, that in the application of surplus revenue towards relieving the burden of the country, due regard should be had to the necessity of affording relief to the agricultural interest. After enumerating a number of Conservative members who in 1836 had supported a similar motion, brought forward by the Marquis of Chandos, and on whom therefore the member for Somersetshire had a right to rely that evening, Mr. Disraeli wound up with another philippic against the Government not less memorable than his speech on Mr. Duncombe's motion.]

**MR. DISRAELI:** When I ineffectually attempted, Sir, to catch your eye, after the conclusion of the speech of the noble lord<sup>2</sup> the member for London, I would then have presumed to offer some considerations to the House on the question respecting protection to native industry which that noble lord mooted; but such considerations I cannot presume to offer at the present hour of the night, and therefore, I am afraid, I must restrict myself to that principle of discussion laid down by my honourable friend the member for Winchester, and confine myself strictly to the motion before the House. But watching, as we all must, with great interest, the formation of the character of an individual so eminent as the noble lord, who has been, as he informed us to-night, thirty years in this House, but appears not yet to have arrived at a result on the great question which now interests the country, I, who would not presume to place my opinions, formed on much more recent experience than those of the noble lord, against his, may yet be permitted to say that, after all, one truth, I think, is perhaps evident from these discussions—that protection is not a principle, but an expedient. If it be the latter, it must

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from *Hansard's Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

<sup>2</sup> Lord John Russell.

depend on circumstances, and, if it depend on circumstances, the matter cannot be settled by those quotations of abstract dogmas which have been cited by the noble lord. However, we shall all have ample opportunity to discuss this great question, which is now the question of the age and of the country. By our speeches or by our votes, either in this House or at the hustings, sooner or later, we must come to the test on this great question, 'Will you have protection or will you have, not free trade, for that is not the alternative, but free imports?' I cannot forget the speech recently delivered by the honourable member for Stockport.<sup>1</sup> That, indeed, is not easily to be forgotten by anyone who listened to it. I will not therefore say that there is much more to be said on both sides of this question than we have yet been favoured with; but I will say, with the greatest respect to those honourable gentlemen whom I see near me, that I do believe that there is much more to be said on one side of the question than has yet been offered to the House.

I shall not presume, however, to enter into the question at present. If, indeed, I held the position of some who at such an hour as this might rise, but who, however anxiously expected, yet do not favour us with their observations, I might venture to enter a field so vast; but I may be permitted to say, that before we come to settle this great question, we must grapple with the important point of waging war against hostile tariffs. We must ascertain how far free imports would affect wages and prices in this country; how far these again would operate on the distribution of the precious metals; and how far the distribution of the precious metals would affect your power of maintaining your standard of value. I am not offering these observations in a controversial tone to the House, but am merely indicating that before we come to that question, which must be settled, there are great considerations which must be entered into in an unimpassioned and, I trust, in a searching manner.

But I now come to the question before the House—the question which the honourable member for Winchester, who advocated with such fervour and ability his opposition to this motion, wishes the present discussion to be narrowed to. I will

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Cobden.

meet him on the ground he has chosen. We have a motion, the terms of which are familiar to every gentleman present—it is to take into consideration in the distribution of the surplus revenue the claims of the agricultural interest. This is not a new motion. It has been introduced to this House before, when honourable gentlemen now on this (the ministerial) side of the House were in Opposition. Under identical circumstances a similar motion was then proposed. What took place under those circumstances ought to be some guide to us as the result of the present motion. The motion brought forward at the time I am referring to was the motion not of a triumphant but of a powerful Opposition—an Opposition distinguished by the quality of cohesion. In 1836 a powerful Opposition, wishing to try a fall with, I will not say a feeble, but at any rate a not-confident Government, selected this motion as a point of battle on which contending parties might try their force. The motion was proposed by a noble friend of mine, who is now a member of the other House—the noble lord the then member for Buckinghamshire: and after a discussion, not of very great length, a division took place, which did not shake the Government to the centre, but made it tremble. In 1836 the majority was not much above thirty in favour of the administration on a vital question. The motions were identical; I believe the phraseology of the resolution of 1836 was identical with the present; and I should suppose therefore, that the honourable member for Somersetshire must have reckoned in bringing forward a resolution which on a previous occasion had united together a great number of supporters, many with distinguished names, on a successful issue to his proposition to-night.

I cannot doubt that the honourable member for Somersetshire, looking to the list embalmed in those records to which we all appeal, and reading the names of those who voted in 1836 with my noble friend, must not only have anticipated equal, but even greater success, for this is a Conservative House of Commons, and the other was a Whig House of Commons. The honourable member must have reckoned on receiving a commanding support in bringing forward this motion. There is the right honourable gentleman the Secretary for Ireland

(Sir T. Fremantle)—he voted under similar circumstances for an identical motion. I know the right honourable gentleman too well for a moment to doubt that he will vote the same way to-night. At the time to which I am alluding, 1836, there was a budget, and there was a surplus, and the agricultural interest came forward and said, 'Are we not to be considered?' The right honourable gentleman the Secretary for Ireland thought that they ought to be considered; and I am not at all surprised at it, as he has always been a friend to agriculture. I remember having had the honour of meeting the right honourable gentleman in the presence of his constituents. I cannot forget the occurrence, because the president of the meeting happened to be the noble individual who brought forward this very resolution in 1836; and I remember the speech which the right honourable gentleman then made. Those were 'dreary moments'—days of Opposition, when there was no chance of getting into power unless you were borne forward by an agricultural cry. I know the feelings of the constituency of Buckingham. They were satisfied, and justly so, with so accomplished a representative; they were satisfied with his sympathy in Opposition; and they knew when he got into power they would have a friend on whom they could count. I should like to know whether, if the constituency of Buckingham had been told that a resolution would be brought forward, at a later period than 1836, similar in its nature to the motion of 1836, and that then their representative, being then a minister, would be found to vote against it, they would have believed such a tale. Of course they would not; and of course the right honourable gentleman, the Secretary for Ireland would not vote against this motion to-night. The noble individual (the Duke of Buckingham) who presided at the dinner to which I have referred, could not, I am sure, suppose for one moment that the right honourable gentleman would vote against the motion, for that noble individual, finding that the policy of the Government was contrary to that policy which he had advocated in Opposition, quitted office.

Therefore I think we may count on the right honourable gentleman the Secretary for Ireland supporting this motion

to-night. I do not think that we need despair of the support of the Vice-President of the Board of Trade (Sir. G. Clerk), for he also supported a similar motion under similar circumstances. In 1836, there being a budget and a surplus, the right honourable gentleman the member for Stamford conceived that the agricultural interest, of which he was the champion, had a right to be considered. No doubt he too will now vote in favour of the present motion. There is also a noble lord the member for a division in Nottinghamshire (Lord Lincoln), no less a person, indeed, than a member of the cabinet. He was also of opinion in Opposition, and at that time, that if there were a surplus the agricultural interest should be considered. If the noble lord was of that opinion when in Opposition, of course now that he is a member of the Government—a Government brought into existence by the agricultural interest—he will divide in favour of the present motion. I believe I might pick up a few Lords of the Treasury, but I will let them pass. I must not omit, however, the gallant officer the Clerk of the Ordnance (Captain Boldero), the member for Chippenham, a district so distinguished for its agricultural feeling. All these gentlemen the honourable member for Somersetshire surely counted on when he entered the House to-night. It is, however, but just to state (and I am sure that all the agricultural constituencies from Buckingham to Chippenham will feel doubly grateful for it, when they read the division list to-morrow and find their representatives were present)—it is, I repeat, but right to state that the right honourable gentleman at the head of the Government was, on the occasion I have referred to, of a different opinion from those other honourable gentlemen whom I have mentioned. He acted in a different manner with respect to that motion; on the division he went into the Whig lobby alone of all his party, whom he left united in favour of the motion. The right honourable baronet did behave throughout in the most handsome manner. He expressed no annoyance at the indiscreet effort of his party, which had almost made him a minister; he did not give them a lecture; he did not say, notwithstanding that they went into a different division lobby from their leader, they had taken out

into open rebellion. The right honourable baronet preserved his consistency, and kept on the very best terms with his party.

That being the state of the case, I have no doubt the right honourable gentleman will vote against the motion to-night; following the precedent of that time, he will treat his immediate supporters with the same affability as he did before. These are facts. We may quote 'Hansard' by the line to prove them. They are facts so notorious, and so fresh in the memory of every gentleman, that it is unnecessary to repeat them. This is sticking to the question, as the honourable member for Winchester requires. I entirely differ from my agricultural friends around me, though I make these observations, in their view of the conduct of the right honourable gentleman; nothing is more easy, when your constituents are dissatisfied, than yourselves to grumble against the right honourable gentleman. I believe the right honourable gentleman has done more for agriculture than any minister or government has done for any quarter of a century. That is my calm deliberate opinion, and placed as I am in momentary collision with the Treasury Bench, I am bound to make this admission. 'Hear! Hear!' as the honourable member says. I am sincerely prepared to maintain that cheer. Why, what has the right honourable gentleman not done for agriculture? Before the meeting of Parliament, the right honourable gentleman reconstructed his cabinet, and left out the Minister of Trade. There was a great compliment to agriculture! It was the most marked thing I know. The agriculturists, then, ought to be satisfied. And yet they complain. They complain of the Corn Law, which they supported; they accuse the Tariff, which was passed at all events with their connivance; they inveigh against the Canada Corn Bill, which, I beg to tell the noble member for London, I did not vote for: they complain of all this. Yet how unreasonable! Can they forget that the right honourable gentleman has expelled from the cabinet the Minister of Commerce, and so made a decided demonstration in favour of agriculture, for which agriculturists should ever be grateful? What do they want? Not this tax to be taken off,

or this act to be done. No, they complain of the 'conduct' of the right honourable gentleman.

There is no doubt a difference in the right honourable gentleman's demeanour as leader of the Opposition and as minister of the Crown. But that's the old story; you must not contrast too strongly the hours of courtship with the years of possession. 'Tis very true that the right honourable gentleman's conduct is different. I remember him making his protection speeches. They were the best speeches I ever heard. It was a great thing to hear the right honourable gentleman say, 'I would rather be the leader of the gentlemen of England than possess the confidence of sovereigns.' That was a grand thing. We don't hear much of 'the gentlemen of England' now. But what of that? They have the pleasures of memory—the charms of reminiscences. They were his first love, and though he may not kneel to them now as in the hour of passion, still they can recall the past; and nothing is more useless or unwise than these scenes of crimination and reproach, for we know that in all these cases, when the beloved object has ceased to charm, it is in vain to appeal to the feelings. You know that this is true. Every man almost has gone through it. My honourable friends reproach the right honourable gentleman. The right honourable gentleman does what he can to keep them quiet; he sometimes takes refuge in arrogant silence, and sometimes he treats them with haughty frigidity; and if they knew anything of human nature they would take the hint and shut their mouths. But they won't. And what then happens? What happens under all such circumstances? The right honourable gentleman, being compelled to interfere, sends down his valet, who says in the genteelest manner, 'We can have no whining here.' And that, Sir, is exactly the case of the great agricultural interest—that beauty which everybody wooed, and one deluded. There is a fatality in such charms, and we now seem to approach the catastrophe of her career. Protection appears to be in about the same condition that Protestantism was in 1828. The country will draw its moral. For my part, if we are to have free trade, I, who honour genius, prefer that such measures should be proposed by the honourable member for Stockport, than by one



who, through skilful Parliamentary manœuvres, has tampered with the generous confidence of a great people and of a great party. For myself, I care not what may be the result. Dissolve, if you please, the Parliament you have betrayed, and appeal to the people, who, I believe, mistrust you. For me there remains this at least—the opportunity of expressing thus publicly my belief that a Conservative Government is an organised hypocrisy.

MAYNOOTH, April 11, 1845.<sup>1</sup>

[On April 3, Sir Robert Peel introduced his Bill for increasing the grant to Maynooth from 9,000*l.* a year to 30,000*l.* In the course of his remarks he dwelt on the poverty-stricken aspect of the college under existing conditions, and the wretched plight of the students, who had to be maintained at an expense of only 23*l.* a piece, while it was found impossible to furnish them all with even separate beds. Sir Robert contended that if the increased grant were objected to as a violation of principle, the existing grant ought to be withdrawn on the same ground. Mr. Disraeli, on the second reading, made great fun of the proposed increase, which would give each student 28*l.* a year instead of 23*l.* But he did not touch the question of principle. He took the Maynooth grant as one out of numerous instances in which the Conservative Government had stultified its former professions, and he urged upon the House the impossibility of keeping up the system of party if this example were generally followed. Without excusing the acerbity which Mr. Disraeli threw into his remarks, we may recognise the truth which they contain. Party is based on the supposition that the balance of the constitution is preserved by the conflict of two opposing theories. When the champions of the one adopt the policy of the other they disturb the machinery by which the whole system works. Were this to happen often the result would follow which Mr. Disraeli deprecated: the constitution would capsize. Exceptional emergencies may justify the temporary neglect of a rule which is essential to its safety. But the experiment is hazardous: while the injury which it is liable to inflict on the political faith and morals of those whom it affects should increase our unwillingness to sanction it. The meaning of Mr. Disraeli's reference to the difference between an ecclesiastical establishment in the days of Mr. Perceval and in the days of Sir Robert Peel is more obscure. He may have intended that the precedent set by the endowment of Maynooth was less dangerous under the old system than it was under the new: when the theory of Church and State was still intact, than when it had been infringed by the legislation of

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from *Hansard's Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

1828 and 1829. Mr. Disraeli said on a subsequent occasion that his speech and vote on the Maynooth Bill broke up the Young England party.]

MR. DISRAELI said: Sir, I should not have intruded for a moment between you and the noble lord<sup>1</sup> just now, had I the slightest idea that he intended to have caught your eye; but the amendment having been withdrawn, I imagined, and the supposition is very general on this side of the House, that we should not have been honoured with any declaration of opinion from gentlemen opposite. But I am extremely glad that the noble lord has had an opportunity of expressing his opinion on the subject. I trust he does not for a moment imagine that I rise to say anything injurious to his creed, which I respect, or anything offensive to himself and his co-religionists, with whom, in many respects, I sympathise. I come to the speech of the right honourable gentleman the member for Newark.<sup>2</sup> My first impression when I listened to that able address was surprise that the right honourable gentleman had passed the gangway to deliver it. It seemed to be worthy of the Treasury Bench which this evening he criticised. It seemed to me that while the right honourable gentleman informed us that though he supported the present Bill, it was not for the reasons which were adduced by his late right honourable chief; yet nevertheless, had he been in his position, and had he introduced the Bill himself, he might have brought forward, perhaps, unanswerable arguments in its favour; and, deeply sensible of what he styled the circumstances of the case, he might, perhaps, have arrested the flow of those petitions which he confesses has astounded him, but which next week, he informs us, will astonish us still more. But if I asked myself for a moment what was the necessity for the right honourable gentleman passing the gangway to deliver that speech, ought I rather not to have asked myself the question, what was the necessity for the right honourable gentleman to have crossed the House to deliver that speech? If those are the opinions the right honourable gentleman entertains, how can he, subtle a casuist as he may be, recon-

<sup>1</sup> Lord Arundel and Surrey.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Gladstone.

cile the course which he now pursues with that which he pursued when in Opposition? Because, after all, what is the result of the adroit argumentation of the right honourable gentleman? It is this: that the principle upon which the State has hitherto been connected with the ecclesiastical affairs of this country is worn out. We must seek a new principle, says the right honourable gentleman, and the Government which I have left because I support it—that Government has discovered a new principle. But where is the new principle? He tells us that it is not now definitely and distinctly made out. He acknowledges that the exposition of it is feeble, a little vague. It is not now complete; we must look to futurity. But if this is the case, have there been no prior attempts to adumbrate this new system, and have no public men in the House raised their voices to support this principle and advocate this new settlement? Have not their opinions been in fact the foundation of measures brought forward by them as a Government which no longer exists? And has not an opposition to their measures, however imperfect their provisions, or however partially advocated, been the bond of union of the party which opposed them and the foundation of the Conservative theory?

I am perfectly ready to agree with the right honourable gentleman that the relation which exists between the Church and the State in this country is an extremely unsatisfactory one. I have had some opportunities for observation on this head. I have been a member of this House now eight or nine sessions, during a very tempestuous period, the principal part of which has been expended in discussions arising out of this controverted principle. I have read the right honourable gentleman's book.<sup>1</sup> But the right honourable gentleman in his argument to-night has made one great assumption. He says: 'You have endowed the Anglican Church. Can you, in fact, refuse to endow the Roman Church?' But have we, in fact, endowed the Anglican Church? That is a question. We know that there has been an alliance between the Church and the State; and the very term 'alliance' shows that they met on equal terms, and made an equal compact. But the right honourable gentleman,

<sup>1</sup> *The State in its Relations with the Church* (1835).

with all his historical lore, and with all his trained casuistry, cannot place his finger on any page in history which shows that the State endowed the Church. You may regret that the ecclesiastical power in this country has a large estate. You may say that it makes it predominant, and reason against the policy ; but its estate is a fact which none can deny. We deal with it as we deal with the great estates of the territorial aristocracy. Parties may be divided upon the policy of the landed inheritance of the country. But you cannot deny the fact. As practical men we deal with great facts in such a way as to secure the greatest possible benefits. But when we come to the question of fresh relations, and speak of endowing religions, the plea, I will not call it an argument, of analogy fails us. I should like to know what principle you will lay down for the step you are invited to take. I know that the right honourable gentleman who introduced the Bill—and I must make the same apology as the right honourable gentleman the late President of the Board of Trade for referring to his speech—told us that upon this subject there were three courses open to us. I never heard the right honourable gentleman bring forward a measure without his making the same confession. I never knew the right honourable gentleman bring forward, not what I call a great measure, but a measure which assumes to settle a great controversy—there is a difference—without saying that three courses were open to us. In a certain sense, and looking to his own position, he is right. There is the course the right honourable gentleman has left. There is the course the right honourable gentleman is following ; and there is usually the course the right honourable gentleman ought to follow. Perhaps, Sir, I ought to add there is a fourth course ; because it is possible for the House of Commons to adopt one of those courses indicated by the right honourable gentleman, and then, having voted for it, to rescind its vote. That is the fourth course, which in future I trust the right honourable gentleman (Sir Robert Peel) will not forget.

The right honourable gentleman tells us to go back to precedents ; with him a great measure is always founded on a small precedent. He traces the steam-engine always back to

the tea-kettle. His precedents are generally tea-kettle precedents. In the present instance, he refers us to Mr. Perceval, and to some odd vote in a dusty corner, from which he infers the principle is admitted. He says, 'You have admitted the principle. Confine yourselves to the details. Don't trouble yourselves about the first and second reading, but reserve all your energies for the Committee, because the principle is admitted.' Now, I deny that, even in the limited sense the right honourable gentleman says, it is admitted. In the first place, that was a temporary vote, and this is not: in fact, it is a permanent one. But I will not make that the ground of opposition to the right honourable gentleman. I will go to the argument, founded on circumstances, of the right honourable gentleman the late President of the Board of Trade<sup>1</sup>: I am somewhat astonished that he should so completely have given up principles. I looked upon the right honourable gentleman as the last paladin of principle, the very abstraction of chivalry: and, when a question was raised which touched the elementary principle of ecclesiastical institutions, I never supposed that it would be the right honourable gentleman who would come and give the House the small change of circumstances to settle this great account.

But have circumstances, which ought to settle everything—have circumstances not changed since the time of Mr. Perceval? How astonished must Mr. Perceval's ghost be—if he have a ghost to be thus appealed to! Were it Mr. Pitt, or Fox, or Burke, whom the right honourable gentleman has quoted to-night, that was brought in to settle this question, we might feel the controlling influence of the great apparition. But Mr. Perceval to be brought in to settle it! Mr. Perceval seems casually to have agreed to a miserable vote about this accidental college at Maynooth. What, let me ask you, was the political and religious situation of affairs by virtue of which Mr. Perceval became Prime Minister at the time of which I am speaking? You had really then in England what you pretend you now have<sup>2</sup>—a constitution in Church and State. You had that constitution, and members of Parliament, being then

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Gladstone. <sup>2</sup> Cf. Speech of Gladstone, Nov. 25, 1854, col. 1, 2.

necessarily in communion with the Church, were, by virtue of this junction of Church and State, in fact members of a lay synod. What, again, was the situation of the other kingdoms of the empire? You had a Church in Scotland without any Dissenters. What was the case with respect to Ireland? There was a constitution in Church and State, not only in principle, but rigidly adhered to. What do we now see? You have no longer in this country your boasted union of Church and State—you may make speeches to prove that the union is as strong as ever—you may toast it at your public dinners; but I tell you that the constitution in Church and State no longer exists. What is the undeniable fact with respect to this proclaimed union? You know very well that the Church of England is subject to the control of those who no longer exclusively profess communion with that Church.

I am politically connected with a district which is threatened with very severe suffering in consequence of this supposed union with Church and State<sup>1</sup>; the inhabitants of this district are about to endure one of the greatest blows that could be inflicted upon them, and this solely because it has pleased a Conservative Government to destroy the ancient episcopate under which they have been so long governed. What is now the position of the Church of Scotland? a Church which the late Earl of Liverpool held up as a model, and as the perfection of a religious community, because, I suppose, it gave him no trouble. What, I repeat, is the present situation of the Church of Scotland? It is rent in twain! Besides the Kirk, there is now the Free Kirk. Well, will you endow the Free Kirk? Will you apply this principle of endowment to sectarians and schismatics of every class? Where will you stop? Why should you stop? And this consideration brings me to the real question before the House. You find your Erastian system crumbling from under your feet. Will you adopt a pantheistic principle? I have unfaltering confidence in the stability of our Church, but I think that the real source of the danger which

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the threatened union of the Sees of Bangor and St. Asaph. Cf. a letter from Bishop Thirlwall to Dr. Whewell, Nov. 18, 1842, in which he condemns the contemplated union in the most forcible and indignant terms.

threatens it is its connection with the State, which places it under the control of a House of Commons that is not necessarily of its communion. Leave the Church to herself, and she will shrink from no contest, however severe. I believe in Ireland itself, if the question be, will you sever the Church from the State, or will you endow the Roman Catholic Church? for my own part, I believe the Protestants of Ireland would say, 'Sever the connection between the Church and the State, and don't endow the Roman Catholics.' But then we come to this other consideration—are we to recognise a pantheistic principle? Because, judging from all that has passed, I can only come to the conclusion that any body of sectarians that can prove a certain population to Downing Street will be considered to have a claim for endowment. For my own part, I confess I have no great confidence in the cure of souls in that quarter. I observe in Downing Street a disposition to assail our old and deeply-rooted habits. From that quarter has proceeded the assault on the parochial constitution of the kingdom. Will they complete it by attending to our spiritual necessities? I am totally opposed to such a proceeding. I can conceive nothing more opposed to or more utterly at variance with the feelings of this country than a police surveillance, such as is contemplated over the religious ordinances of the people. I deny that the Church of England is the creature of the State. The alliance between them has been one formed and maintained upon equal terms; and if it be attempted, as appears to be the intention, to place all ecclesiastical affairs under the control of Downing Street, and to subject them to the same species of discipline that is enforced in Prussia over the religious establishments there, I tell the right honourable gentleman that the people of this country will never endure such a system.

This alone is a sufficient ground for me to oppose the Bill before the House. I will not say that this Bill has been introduced into the House in a sinister and insidious manner, though I, in common with others, have formed my conclusions upon that point; but I will assert, what I believe cannot be denied, that this measure has taken the country by surprise. But I have other reasons for opposing this measure. I oppose



this Bill on account of the manner in which it has been introduced, and I oppose it also on account of the men by whom it has been brought forward. (Loud cheers.) I am perfectly ready to meet those cheers, and I do so by declaring that I do not think—putting totally out of view the other objections which I entertain—that the gentlemen who are now seated on the Treasury Bench are morally entitled to bring such a measure forward. This measure, Sir, involves a principle against which the right honourable gentleman and most of his colleagues have all along signally struggled. When I recall to mind all the speeches, and all the motions, and all the votes which have emanated from the present occupants of the Treasury Bench on this and analogous questions; when I remember their opposition to that system of education which they now seek to promote; when I recollect the procession of prelates going up to the palace of the Sovereign to protest against measures analogous to those which the very men who incited that procession are now urging forward; when I recall to mind all the discussions which have taken place here upon the subject of Irish education; when the Appropriation Clause presents itself to my memory, I consider it would be worse than useless to dwell at any length upon the circumstances which induce me to adopt that opinion. And are we to be told that because those men who took the course to which I have referred have crossed the floor of this House, and have abandoned with their former seats their former professions—are we to be told that these men's measures and actions are to remain uncriticised and unopposed, because they tell us to look to the merits of their measures, and to forget themselves and their former protestations?

Such pretensions naturally lead to the question whether party, as a political instrument, is or is not to continue to govern the discussions of this House? The question touches the whole of their ministry. Let us, therefore, grapple with it, and decide what our future course shall be in this respect. Let us endeavour to put an end to the misconception and subterfuge which now surround us. I am perfectly contented to place the question upon this footing. Now, Sir, it is very easy to complain of party government, and there may be persons capable of

forming an opinion on this subject who may entertain a deep objection to that government, and know to what that objection leads. But there are others who shrug their shoulders, and talk in a slipshod style on this head, who, perhaps, are not exactly aware of what the objections lead to. These persons should understand that if they object to party government, they do, in fact, object to nothing more nor less than Parliamentary government.<sup>1</sup> A popular assembly without parties—500 isolated individuals—cannot stand five years against a minister with an organised Government without becoming a servile senate. The objectors to party government may have a good case, on the merits of which I give no opinion. They may say, ‘Here are we, the Parliament of England; we have had the virtual sovereignty of this country for a century and a half; we have plunged the country into debt, and we can’t pay it. We have done more than patrician Rome in its most rapacious hour; we have *mortgaged industry to protect property*. We have passed laws on the currency which have affected property more than all the tampering of the coinage by all the sovereigns that have ever existed; we have violently assailed, and now still more enormously menace, the parochial constitution of the country, and, having differed on every other subject, we have at length agreed on one point, that, with relation to civilisation, the wealth and luxury that surround them, the people of England are the hardest worked and the worst fed, the most miserable and degraded population in the world.’ This is the case of those who are opposed to party government. Well, let them carry out their principle; let them vote an Address to the Crown, go up to Buckingham Palace, fall on their knees before our Sovereign Lady, and restore to her the prerogatives which they have so long usurped and injuriously used. But for

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sir G. C. Lewis’ speech on vote of want of confidence, June 10, 1832: ‘I fully admit that this motion is a party move . . . but I must be permitted to remark that all great questions in this House have been decided by party moves. A Parliamentary system can only be conducted by the constant operation of parties. If we look back to former times we shall find that all great questions—the Reform Bill of 1832, Catholic Emancipation, and the Repeal of the Corn Laws—were dealt with in the way of party moves, and whatever amelioration is to be expected in our present state must arise from the constitution of the House of Commons, passed from the same source.’

the right honourable gentleman, even a pedant in favour of Parliamentary power, who, First Minister of the Crown, declares he is ready to go to war to-morrow with the Lord Chief Justice of England in behalf of your privileges ; who is jealous of the slightest interference with your business or your duties, even if you cannot transact or perform them ; who enjoins the youth of England not to make brilliant speeches, but to work on railway committees—for him to set up for one who would be independent of Parliament and party is indeed astonishing.

The noble lord opposite, the hereditary leader of the Whig party, which founded Parliamentary government in this country, will, I am sure, not withhold his concurrence with the principles I have laid down. That noble lord, the representative of Mr. Fox, will not gainsay the motto of that great leader—‘ Measures, and not Men.’ And I would ask gentlemen on this side, how has the opposite system answered for them ? You have permitted men to gain power and enter place, and then carry measures exactly the reverse to those which they professed in Opposition, and they carry these measures by the very means and machinery by which they conducted the Opposition, and by which they gained power. And you are reconciled to this procedure by being persuaded that by carrying measures which you disapprove of and they pretend to disrelish, they are making what they call ‘ the best bargain ’ for you. I say that the Parliamentary course is for this House to have the advantage of a Government formed on distinct principles, and having in consequence a constitutional Opposition. Here is a minister who habitually brings forward as his own measures those very schemes and proposals to which, when in Opposition, he always avowed himself a bitter and determined opponent. He brings in Canada Bills ; he brings in Maynooth Bills ; he uses expressions and excites feelings far more objectionable than the measures ; but, let me ask the admirers of ‘ the best bargain ’ system how they think the right honourable gentleman would have acted had they been introduced by the noble lord opposite ? Why, then those Bills would have been at least checked by the Opposition, by a constitutional Opposition ; the questions would have been criticised, the measures would have been

modified. Grant even that some measures might have been factiously opposed ; that would have been only one of the necessary inconveniences of a Parliamentary government. In what situation are we placed now ? Up come all these petitions ; in them we hear the loud murmurs of the people, because there is no exponent of a great national opinion in this House, while we have a Government which came into power by an organisation prepared to oppose such measures, now engaged in carrying them. I may on constitutional grounds say the noble lord (Lord John Russell) ought to oppose the present measure, though he approves it, because it is thus brought forward. He will reply, it is for those who act on another set of principles to oppose the Government ; consequently the country is without a constitutional Opposition to keep the Government in check.

Now, I hope it will not be said, because I have made these observations, which are in entire and complete relation and affinity to the motion before the House, that I am ‘bandying personalities.’ Certainly we live in strange times, when Parliamentary criticism on a person in so eminent a position as First Minister of the Crown is to be stopped by his declaring it personality, when it is but fair observation on the character and conduct of a public man, whose career is open to us, with respect to whom we have a right to draw the inferences we think legitimate ; and if they are not just they may be contravened in free discussion. I do not know what the House thinks of this system of putting down Parliamentary discussion. It is not a very new experiment ; it has been tried in—I will not say another House, for that must not be referred to—but it has been tried in what is called ‘another place.’ I do not know whether the position occupied by ‘another place’ in the public estimation and the public eye is one of which the members of the House of Commons are particularly ambitious. I remember when we used to toast ‘another place’ with three times three and nine times nine ; the independence of ‘another place’ was once a favourite toast at all Conservative dinners. Where is the independence of ‘another place’ now ? It is not Radicalism, it is not the revolutionary spirit of the nineteenth century which has consigned ‘another place’ to illustrious insignifi-

cance ; it is Conservatism and a Conservative dictator. Are you prepared to meet the same fate ? Every time a member expresses any opinions not absolutely agreeable to the minister of the day, is he to be stopped by a charge of ‘bandying personalities’ ? Whenever the young men of England allude to any great principle of political life or Parliamentary conduct, are they to be recommended to go to a railway committee ? I have no doubt it would be very agreeable if this House were in the same condition, especially with regard to the Bill, as ‘another place.’ I know the elements of this House are different, that the characters of the individuals who would control us are different ; but the process with both bodies, although it varies, is in result the same. It may break the spirit in ‘another place,’ and it may lower the tone in this ; ‘another place’ may be drilled into a guard-room, and the House of Commons may be degraded into a vestry ; but the consequence may be exactly similar, and that consequence may be that you will have Bills like the Maynooth Bill, and that still more important measure<sup>1</sup> which, after the admission of the right honourable member for Newark, may be looked on as a fact, if not accomplished, yet ascertained, introduced, and carried through this House, and of course through ‘another place :’ and you may have the floor of this House covered with petitions and the lobby of ‘another place’ crowded with constituents who have left us in despair ; but, whatever may be the degree of public feeling, whatever may be the depth of national sentiment, if you choose to support a Government that announces no distinctive principles, which is in turn supported by an Opposition which does not oppose, I am certain there is no spirit and no nation that can resist a ‘cross’ so deeply laid and so deliberately accomplished.

This Maynooth Bill, I suppose, is introduced instead of the Irish Registration Bill, the necessity for which was so apparent when the right honourable gentleman was in Opposition. It is brought in after a four years’ experiment of lowering your tone, and working that, constitutionally, by means of a Whig Opposition. During those four years what has the Conservative party

<sup>1</sup> Endowment of Roman Catholic clergy. .

endured? What has it experienced? What is the treatment it has been obliged to submit to, till the thing was so ripe that even your murmurs are not noticed? This Bill brings affairs to a crisis; the question is not to be decided on its merits; it is to be decided on the fact—who are the men who bring it forward? If you are to have a popular government, if you are to have a Parliamentary administration, the conditions antecedent are, that you should have a Government which declares the principles upon which its policy is founded, and then you can have on them the wholesome check of a constitutional Opposition. What have we got instead? Something has risen up in this country as fatal in the political world as it has been in the landed world of Ireland—we have a great Parliamentary middle-man. It is well known what a middle-man is: he is a man who bamboozles one party and plunders the other, till, having obtained a position to which he is not entitled, he cries out, ‘Let us have no party questions, but a fixity of tenure.’ I want to have a commission issued to inquire into the tenure by which Downing Street is held. I want to know whether the conditions of entry have been complied with, and whether there are not some covenants in the lease which are already forfeited. I hope I shall not be answered by ‘Hansard.’ I am not surprised the right honourable gentleman should be so fond of recurring to that great authority; he has great advantages; he can look over a record of thirty, and more than thirty, years of an eminent career. But that is not the lot of everyone; and I may say as a general rule I am rather surprised that your experienced statesmen should be so fond of recurring to that eminent publication. What, after all, do they see on looking over a quarter of a century or more even of their speeches in ‘Hansard’? What dreary pages of interminable talk, what predictions falsified, what pledges broken, what calculations that have gone wrong, what budgets that have blown up! And all this, too, not relieved by a single original thought, a single generous impulse, or a single happy expression! Why, ‘Hansard,’ instead of being the Delphi of Downing Street is but the Dunciad of politics. But I want something more than quotations from ‘Hansard’ to account for the process

by which parties have been managed in this House. It is a system so matter of fact and yet so fallacious—taking in everybody, though everybody knows he is deceived—so mechanical and yet so Machiavellian, that I can hardly say what it is, except a sort of humdrum *hocus pocus* in which the order of the day is read to take in a nation.

Now, the system is to be brought to a test to-night. Will the House support the Government in a measure which, according to the highest authority—one that has quitted the cabinet for some reason that has not been given, and who, probably, may join it again under circumstances equally obscure—is, in fact, an endowment for the Roman Catholic priesthood of Ireland? If any vote were at stake in which the social and political equality of the Roman Catholic population were concerned, I would go as far as any man in the House, and perhaps further than many. But, Sir, no one pretends that this is now the question. The grounds on which I oppose this motion are not those of hostility to their claims, but grounds which they themselves, after the clamour of the moment, must feel are legitimate ones. I cannot admit the plea of *ad misericordiam*, founded on the state of Maynooth. Surely men of high spirit and bearing cannot for a moment bring themselves to suppose that we shall be induced to vote for the measure on this plea; it would be an insult to them to suppose so. I know there are Roman Catholic colleges, well organised and well ordered, that are not in the condition of Maynooth; there are sectarian colleges in England with larger revenues even than those now proposed to be given by the Government in support of Roman Catholic principles. What sustains them? The sympathy of their co-religionaries. I cannot believe, therefore, that those gentlemen will, upon reflection, be anxious that this Bill should pass. I do not think it a measure either flattering to their pride, or solacing to their feelings; I do not think it either a great or a liberal measure.

The right honourable gentleman is a supreme master of Parliamentary tactics, and when he found he was not receiving from the seats behind him the once abundant chorus of applause to which he was accustomed, he went forward to the red box, and

saying, 'I know this is a great grant to Maynooth,' obtained the heedless assent of some honourable gentlemen opposite to the assertion. But if the right honourable gentleman's principle is correct, I think it is not a great grant; I think it is a mean, a meagre, and a miserable grant. If the Roman Catholic priesthood are to be educated by the State it must be something greater than the difference between 23*l.* and 28*l.*, something higher than the difference between three in a bed and two. That is not the way, under any circumstances, in which I would approach a reverend priesthood. I cannot believe, therefore, that the Roman Catholic gentlemen on reflection—and I hope they will have time for reflection—will vote for this measure when they consider what it is. Who is he who introduces it? It is the same individual whose bleak shade fell on the sunshine of your hopes for more than a quarter of a century. Will not this consideration affect you? What if it be a boon? I deny that it is one—but if it were the boon it is said to be, would you accept it from hands polluted? It is not from him you ought to accept it—not from him who, urged on, as he reluctantly admitted, by fatal State necessity, accompanied the concession of your legitimate political claims by the niggardly avowal that he was obliged to concede them.

As to the Whigs, I am almost in despair of appealing to their hereditary duties, their constitutional convictions, or their historical position; but I should have thought that the noble lord opposite was almost weary of being dragged at the triumphal car of a conqueror who did not conquer him in fair fight. I think the noble lord might have found some inspiration in the writings of that great man whom he has so often quoted, and whose fame he attempts to emulate. I should have thought that a man of the mind and spirit of the noble lord—and he has a thoughtful mind and a noble spirit—might have felt that Mr. Fox would have taken that course which I still think the noble lord, touched by his high position, and the responsibility of that position, will still adopt. His party may have fallen, but it is still one connected with the history of this country. Other parties have also fallen; they have been reconstructed and they have been destroyed. The noble lord



is not in so fallen a position as that in which the right honourable gentleman was in 1831. But let the noble lord beware of this—let him beware of rising from that degraded position again by the same system of tactics.<sup>1</sup> They may bring some short-lived success, but upon conditions which I believe the gallant spirit of the noble lord would disdain. I do not then despair, Sir, of the aid of the Roman Catholic gentry of Ireland, or of the Whigs of England, in opposing this measure respecting Maynooth, as well as of those who would reject it on exclusively Protestant principles, or on the general principle against State interference which I have attempted to uphold. But, whatever may be the various motives and impulses which animate these different sections of opinion, there is at least one common ground for co-operation—there is one animating principle which may inspire us all. Let us in this House re-echo that which I believe to be the sovereign sentiment of this country; let us tell persons in high places that cunning is not caution, and that habitual perfidy is not high policy of State. On that ground we may all join. Let us bring back to this House that which it has for so long a time past been without—the legitimate influence and salutary check of a constitutional Opposition. That is what the country requires, what the country looks for. Let us do it at once in the only way in which it can be done, by dethroning this dynasty of deception, by putting an end to this intolerable yoke of official despotism and Parliamentary imposture.

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.* As those by which Sir Robert rose.

SPEECH ON ADDRESS, January 22, 1846.<sup>1</sup>

[Sir Robert Peel had now declared his Free Trade policy ; and the following speech is a kind of grand cannonade, before the attack began on specific propositions.]

SIR, I rise with some feeling of embarrassment to address the House at this stage of the debate, as it is only since I have entered the House that I have had the advantage of reading Her Majesty's Speech ; and I had understood that the great question which now agitates the country was not to be discussed on the present occasion. I thought that, under protest perhaps, we should be allowed to address Her Majesty in language closely akin to that in which Her Majesty had addressed us, and that all topics which could excite any difference of opinion might be avoided. After the announcement of the right honourable gentleman, that an early day was to be appointed for the discussion of that question, I should have abstained from intruding myself on the House at the present moment, had it not been for the peculiar tone of the right honourable gentleman. I think that tone ought not to pass unnoticed. At the same time I do not wish to conceal my opinions on the general subject. I am not one of the converts. I am, perhaps, a member of a fallen party. To the opinions which I have expressed in this House in favour of protection I adhere. They sent me to this House, and if I had relinquished them, I should have relinquished my seat also. I must say that the tone of the right honourable gentleman is hardly fair towards the House, while he stops discussion upon a subject on which he himself has entered and given vent to his feelings.

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

with a fervency unusual to him. Sir, I admire a minister who says he holds power to give effect to his own convictions. These are sentiments that we must all applaud. Unfortunate will be the position of this country when a minister pursues a line of policy adverse to the convictions which he himself entertains. But when we come to a question of such high delicacy as the present, we may be permitted to ask ourselves what are the circumstances which require one so able, and one so eminent, to enter upon the vindication of himself, and to rise in this House, amid the cheers of his former opponents, to place himself in a position of an apologetical character to those who were once of his own party? I have no doubt that the right honourable gentleman has arrived at a conscientious conclusion on this great subject. The right honourable gentleman says that it is not so much by force of argument as by the cogency of observation that he has arrived at this conclusion. But, Sir, surely the observation which the right honourable gentleman has made might have been made when he filled a post scarcely less considerable than that which he now occupies, and enjoyed power scarcely less ample than that which he now wields in this House. I want to know how it is that the right honourable gentleman, who certainly enjoys the full maturity of manhood, should not have arrived at this opinion, which I deplore, although conscientious, at the moment when his present Government was formed? What, Sir, are we to think of the eminent statesman who, having served under four sovereigns; unable to complain of want of experience or royal confidence; who, having been called on to steer the ship on so many occasions, and under such perilous circumstances, has only during the last three years found it necessary entirely to change his convictions on that important topic which must have presented itself for more than a quarter of a century to his consideration?

Sir, I must say that such a minister may be conscientious, but that he is unfortunate. I will say, also, that he ought to be the last man in the world to turn round and upbraid his party in a tone of menace. Sir, there is a difficulty in finding a parallel to the position of the right honourable gentleman in any part of history. The only parallel which I can find is an incident in

the late war in the Levant, which was terminated by the policy of the noble lord opposite. I remember when that great struggle was taking place, when the existence of the Turkish Empire was at stake, the late Sultan, a man of great energy and fertile in resources, was determined to fit out an immense fleet to maintain his empire. Accordingly a vast armament was collected. It consisted of some of the finest ships that were ever built. The crews were picked men, the officers were the ablest that could be found, and both officers and men were rewarded before they fought. There never was an armament which left the Dardanelles similarly appointed since the days of Solyman the Great. The Sultan personally witnessed the departure of the fleet; all the muftis prayed for the success of the expedition, as all the muftis here prayed for the success of the last general election. Away went the fleet, but what was the Sultan's consternation, when the Lord High-Admiral steered at once into the enemy's port! Now, Sir, the Lord High-Admiral on that occasion was very much misrepresented. He, too, was called a traitor, and he, too, vindicated himself. 'True it is,' said he, 'I did place myself at the head of this valiant armada; true it is that my Sovereign embraced me: true it is that all the muftis in the Empire offered up prayers for my success: but I have an objection to war. I see no use in prolonging the struggle, and the only reason I had for accepting the command was that I might terminate the contest by betraying my master.' And, Sir, these reasons offered by a man of great plausibility, of vast adroitness, have had their effect, for—you may be surprised at it—but I assure you it is a fact, which, by the way, the gallant officer opposite (Commodore Napier) can testify, that he is at this moment the First Lord of the Admiralty at Constantinople, under the new reign. The gallant Commodore says that he is dead. At any rate he was shot for treason.

Well now, the right Honourable gentleman has turned round on us, and in a peroration, the elaborate character of which remarkably contrasted with the garrulous confidence of all the doings of his cabinet, the right Honourable gentleman told us that he had been assured that a certain

power had made him minister, and that a certain power would prevent him from being a minister; but that he protested against such an authority, and that he never would hold office by so servile a tenure. Sir, no one can fill a position such as that of the right honourable gentleman, and give utterance to sentiments so magnanimous as his, without reference to antecedents. And that leads us to the consideration of that Government by parties which must never be lost sight of in estimating the position of the right honourable gentleman. It is all very well for the right honourable gentleman to say, 'I am the First Minister'—and, by the by, I think the right honourable gentleman might as well adopt the phraseology of Walpole, and call himself the sole minister, for his speech was rich in egoistic rhetoric—it is all very well for him to speak of himself as the sole minister, for as all his cabinet voted against him, he is quite right not to notice them. I repeat, it is all very well for the right honourable gentleman to come forward to this table and say: 'I am thinking of posterity, although, certainly, I am doing on this side of the table the contrary to that which I counselled when I stood upon the other; but my sentiments are magnanimous, my aim is heroic, and, appealing to posterity, I care neither for your cheers nor your taunts.'

But, Sir, we must ask ourselves, as members of the House of Commons, as the subjects of a popular government—we must ask ourselves, what were the means, what the machinery, by which the right honourable gentleman acquired his position, how he obtained power to turn round upon his supporters, and to treat them with contempt and disdain? Sir, the right honourable gentleman has supported a different policy for a number of years. Well do we remember on this side of the House—perhaps not without a blush—well do we remember the efforts which we made to raise him to the bench on which he now sits. Who does not remember the 'sacred cause of protection,' the cause for which sovereigns were thwarted, Parliaments dissolved, and a nation taken in? Delightful, indeed, to have the right honourable gentleman entering into all his confidential details, when, to use his courtly language, he 'called' upon his sovereign. Sir, he called on his sovereign; but would his

sovereign have called on the right honourable baronet, if, in 1841, he had not placed himself, as he said, at the head of the gentlemen of England—that well-known position, to be preferred even to the confidence of sovereigns and Courts? It is all very well for the right honourable baronet to take this high-flying course, but I think myself—I say it with great respect for gentlemen on this side of the House, and gentlemen on the other; I say it without any wish to achieve a party triumph, for I believe I belong to a party which can triumph no more; for we have nothing left on our side except the constituencies which we have betrayed; but I do say my conception of a great statesman is of one who represents a great idea—an idea which may lead him to power; an idea with which he may identify himself; an idea which he may develop; an idea which he may and can impress on the mind and conscience of a nation. That, Sir, is my notion of what makes a man a great statesman. I do not care whether he be a manufacturer or a manufacturer's son. That is a grand, that is, indeed, an heroic position. But I care not what may be the position of a man who never originates an idea—a watcher of the atmosphere, a man who, as he says, takes his observations, and when he finds the wind in a certain quarter, trims to suit it. Such a person may be a powerful minister, but he is no more a great statesman than the man who gets up behind a carriage is a great whip. Both are disciples of progress; both perhaps may get a good place. But how far the original momentum is indebted to their power, and how far their guiding prudence regulates the lash or the rein, it is not necessary for me to notice.

Why, Sir, the right honourable gentleman places himself in this position in the House: he tells us that he has held high office under four sovereigns, 'George III., George IV., William IV., and Queen Victoria.' His historic career, for it amounts to that, is that he has served four sovereigns—it is his own recommendation. It is as much as to say, 'I am able and experienced: the grandfather of our present sovereign trusted me; a Regent and a King trusted me; a King in a revolution trusted me; a Conservative sovereign trusted me. I must be wise and able and experienced.' He tells you this in his own

recommendation, and he adds, 'Follow me.' Follow him? Who is to follow him, or why is anybody to follow him, or where is anybody to follow him to? What does he mean to do, this great statesman who talks with a sneer of an 'ancient monarchy,' and 'a proud aristocracy,' and the difficulty of reconciling them with a reformed constituency, and who tells us that we are but drags on the wheel, and that he is the only driver. Have we arrived at that? Is that the opinion of the majority of this House, or even of the minority—of the majority of the country, or even of the minority? Is it their opinion that ancient monarchies and proud aristocracies are inconvenient lumber, to be got rid of on the first convenient opportunity; that they are things irreconcilable with a reformed constituency—reformed under this minister's own protest, in spite of his own protest—this man who comes forward and tells us that he is devoting himself to his country, and sacrificing himself to his sovereign, and that he is the only man who can advise you what counsel it is most expedient for you to pursue. He tells you that he is still purely Conservative; for, asks he, 'Has not my administration put down agitation?' Sir, I confess when I heard this, that, great as undoubtedly are the powers of the right honourable gentleman—I confess, Sir, that I was thunderstruck. I could forget the agitated councils, called without a cause, and dismissed without a consequence; the candid explanation of the situation of his cabinet—his admission that the only man in that body who dared to speak the truth differed from him; the almost humble confession that, in spite of Lyon Playfair and Professor Lindley, he had been misled in his information; that his Viceroy, who, being a diplomatist, communicated his principal information in a postscript, had caused such false impressions in the cabinet that the Secretary of State was obliged to send a courier for an explanation—all these frank details I could afford to admire in one who has taken up so lofty a position as the right honourable baronet says he has taken, and who can afford to speak truth. But really when he told us that his Conservative administration has put down agitation; when he said this in the face of the honourable member for Stockport, in the face of the honourable member for Durham,

then, Sir, I confess that the right honourable baronet did manage to achieve the first great quality of oratory—that he did succeed in making an impression on his audience! Put down agitation! Will he rise and deny that he is legislating or about to legislate with direct reference to agitation? What other excuses has he—for even his mouldy potatoes have failed him, even the reports of his vagrant professors have failed him—to induce the noble representative of South Lancashire, and the honourable representative of Yorkshire, to come forward and stand his bail?

Sir, I remember in the midst of a great revolution, when all the principles of our social system were called into question; when we heard much of the inconvenience of ancient monarchies and proud aristocracies; when it was necessary to invent some means, to devise some expedient, to manage reformed constituencies; well do I remember that great mind, which was to control divided counsels, to guide a distracted people, delivering itself of that oracle, which rang so solemnly over the land, ‘Register, register, register!’ Register, some thought, to save the Corn Laws; some, to save the monarchy; some, to save the Church. We went on registering, and the right honourable gentleman went on making protection speeches—a great orator before a green table beating a red box. Then he showed us the sovereign passion—we were to register to make him a minister. The statesman who opposed Catholic Emancipation against arguments as cogent as any which the gentlemen of the League can now offer, in spite of political expediency a thousand times more urgent than that which now besets him; always ready with his arguments and amendments; always ready with his fallacies ten thousand times exploded; always ready with his Virgilian quotations to command a cheer—the moment that an honourable and learned gentleman was returned for the county of Clare, then immediately we saw this right honourable gentleman, not ashamed to recall his arguments, not ashamed to confess that he was convinced, but telling us, on the contrary, that he should be ashamed if he had not the courage to come forward and propose a resolution exactly contrary to his previous policy.



And so is it always with the right honourable gentleman. Nursed in the House of Commons, entertaining no idea but that of Parliamentary success, if you wish to touch him to the quick you must touch him on the state of the poll. The moment he heard of South Lancashire being lost—by means respecting which I will not, at this moment, say anything—the moment he heard that Yorkshire was in danger, the right honourable baronet, the minister who has served four sovereigns, the gentleman who has had the question of protection before his official mind in every shape which ingenuity could devise during his Parliamentary career of a quarter of a century; this gentleman suddenly finds that the arguments in favour of protection to native industry are not, after all, so cogent as he once thought them; he discovers that the principle of protection cannot be supported; and, having arrived at this conclusion, then, with all the debating dexterity, with all the Parliamentary adroitness he possesses, he comes forward—he has the sublime audacity to come forward and confess that at his ripe age he is convinced by arguments the very same we have heard for the last thirty years; and, greater triumph still, he has the Parliamentary tact to convince most of his supporters that he is sincere.

Sir, I give the right honourable gentleman full credit; I admire his Parliamentary powers; I admit them; I appreciate them; but it is really too much for a minister who has led such a career, who offers us such arguments, who tells us, in effect, that it is not intellect which should govern; that it is not great and true ideas which should govern; but that it is the state of the registration, and the accident of the poll—it is, I repeat, too much for such a man to come forward and talk to us in high-pitched language about his lofty spirit, about his determination never to be the tool of those of whom, when in Opposition, he was, by the by, the very ready counsellor—to come forward and say that he is but thinking of posterity, that he is touched by the love of fame, the noblest of all aspirations, and which alone constitutes the highest reward for his great toils. What an advantage to a country to be governed by a minister who thinks only of posterity! The right hon-

ourable gentleman has before assured us that he and his colleagues are only thinking of 'the future.' Who can doubt it? Look at them. Throw your eyes over the Treasury Bench. See stamped on each ingenuous front, 'The last infirmity of noble minds.' They are all of them, as Spenser says, 'Imps of Fame!' They are just the men in the House you would fix upon as thinking only of posterity. The only thing is, when one looks at them, seeing of what they are composed, one is hardly certain whether 'the future,' of which they are thinking, is indeed posterity, or only the coming quarter-day. I should like to know what posterity will think of a cabinet which resigns office because it cannot support a policy, and accepts office for the same reason. In the history of England, in the history of parties, I defy any man—I defy even the right honourable member for Edinburgh, with his disciplined memory and cultivated mind—I defy any man learned in English history, to adduce me a case parallel to this.

And what is to be the result? If 'coming events cast their shadows before,' I suppose no gentleman in a sane state of mind can doubt it. We resisted the moderate proposal of the Whigs. We rejected it, confiding in the experience of that practised individual—the gentleman who has served four sovereigns. We were blind enough to believe that a gentleman of such great ability, of such long experience, who had had such immense advantages, could not make very gross and palpable blunders. We accepted him for a leader to accomplish the triumph of protection, and now we are to attend the catastrophe of protection. Of course the Whigs will be the chief mourners. They cannot but weep for their innocent, though it was an abortion; but ours was a fine child. Who can forget how its nurse dandled it, fondled it? What a charming babe! Delicious little thing! So thriving! Did you ever see such a beauty for its years? This was the tone, the innocent prattle. And then the nurse, in a fit of patriotic frenzy, dashes its brains out, and comes down to give master and mistress an account of this terrible murder. The nurse, too, a person of a very orderly demeanour; not given to drink; and never showing any emotion, except of late, when kicking against protection.

How ungrateful! For, God knows, we were more than obedient—we were servile. But how is it now? The most valuable colleague of the right honourable gentleman—I say so for good reasons—has protested against him. Lord Stanley, who, when the right honourable baronet was in Opposition, was the great adhesion that was to make Conservative principles triumphant—he, if I have not been misinformed by some one too zealous to hear aright, for I have not had the advantage of hearing that noble lord's speech to-night in another place; but I am told that that noble lord has stated that he quitted the ministry because he found they were leaving the principles upon which they obtained the confidence of Parliament.

I say the confidence of Parliament. I am not one of those who have ever exaggerated the character, the powers, the privileges of Parliament, or of either separate House; but, after all, is it not the constitution of the country? I want to know what leading man dare rise in this House—I care not on which side he sits—who will for a moment pretend that he has gained the position he occupies except by the confidence of Parliament? It is very well to come to us with stories about his sovereign and about posterity; but where would the right honourable baronet have been if the House of Commons had not existed. Now, I say, it is utterly impossible to carry on your Parliamentary constitution except by political parties. I say there must be distinct principles as lines of conduct adopted by public men. Away with your talk about going down to Windsor, and finding that Lord John this or Lord William that cannot form a ministry, and saying, 'Then I must form one, and bring all my colleagues to support measures that they entirely disapprove!' Is that the constitution that governs England? If the constitution that governs England be a constitution that makes men recommend that of which they do not approve, then the sooner we get rid of this constitution the better. It comes to that; and the noble lord opposite, the member for London, who has a respect for the Parliamentary constitution, and who represents a party that are nothing if they do not respect a Parliamentary constitution, ought to resist such a vulgar, ignoble innovation. I can understand an abso-

lute sovereign, in a country of high civilisation, governing through a Council of State, selected by his arbitrary but intelligent will from the ablest men of the country; but we have a Parliamentary constitution. It may have committed great wrongs; undoubtedly it has achieved immense and magnificent results; but this House of Commons still forms a part of the constitution, though how degraded and demoralised it may become, if the principles we have heard to-night are to be acknowledged, I confess I cannot tell. If the principles advocated by the right honourable baronet to-night be once admitted, I ask anyone capable of forming an opinion upon public questions, whether Parliament can be anything but a servile senate. Six hundred men met together without the sympathy of great principles and great ideas, to wield all the power of a country, with all the patronage of the country at the command of one man appointed by the sovereign to direct them as he will—who can doubt what the result would be? In a neighbouring country, yet in the infancy of its representative system, and therefore to be looked at in a kind, apologetic spirit, they have no Parliamentary parties; and at this moment while we are talking of the danger of the Napoleonists and the Republicans, the danger is a corrupted senate—an assembly professing to represent the people, and wielding all their power at the command of a single individual.

Do you aspire to such a position? You will not be brought to this; but what may you in the interval have to pass through? If you had a daring, dashing minister, a Danby or a Walpole, who tells you frankly, ‘I am corrupt, and I wish you to be corrupt also,’ we might guard against this; but what I cannot endure is, to hear a man come down and say, ‘I will rule without respect of party, though I rose by party; and I care not for your judgment, for I look to posterity.’ Sir, very few people reach posterity. Who amongst us may arrive at that destination, I presume not to vaticinate. Posterity is a most limited assembly. Those gentlemen who reach posterity are not much more numerous than the planets. But one thing is quite evident, that while we are appealing to posterity—that while we are admitting the principle of relaxed con-

merce, there is extreme danger of our admitting the principles of relaxed politics. I advise, therefore, that we all, whatever may be our opinions about free trade, oppose the introduction of free politics. Let men stand by the principle by which they rise, right or wrong. I make no exception. If they be in the wrong, they must retire to that shade of private life with which our present rulers have often threatened us. There are always men ready to form a Government; and if the noble lord had formed one, and the country would not support free trade, that would not show that his principles were wrong; but it would show a great political fact, important in the state of our country, that the nation was not ripe for those opinions, or that it was against them. This is a legitimate thing, but it is not a legitimate trial of the principles of free trade against the principle of protection if a Parliament, the majority of which are elected to support protection, be gained over to free trade by the arts of the very individual whom they were elected to support in an opposite career. It is not fair to the people of England.

As for whether the right honourable baronet made the Conservative party, or the party made him, I have no doubt there was a reciprocal influence; but he is a great Parliamentary leader, and undoubtedly we might, with a leader less able, not have gained such a result as we did. I attribute our success at the last election in some degree to the impolicy of the Whigs; warmly opposed to them as I am, I may say that, though I wish to say nothing against gentlemen who happen to be in adversity; but if the right honourable baronet had not led us so many years with most adroit ability; if, during that term, he had not had recourse to all the arts of party; if he had not proposed subtle resolutions, and even, if necessary, amendments on the Address, if he had not, with a frankness unusual to him, expressed principles to which the country responded, would he have been carried into power by an enthusiastic people? Then, how can you, the Opposition, if you are for Parliamentary government, offer him this adulation because he now supports your views? You may be very glad that an eminent member of the House is on your side: that is

an historical fact which you may register, and adduce it in evidence of the truth of your views, and the advance of your cause ; but depend upon it you err when you admit the principle that you are to support any man, whoever he may be, who supports your opinions. The minister who attained as he did the position which the right honourable baronet now fills, is not the minister who ought to abrogate the Corn Laws. That feeling, I believe, is not confined to this House. Whatever may be the fate of Government—whether we are to have a Whig administration or a Conservative ; whether the noble lord or the right honourable gentleman is to guide the sceptre of the State ; whatever, I say, may be the fate of cabinets—and they are transitory and transient things ; things which may not survive the career of many men in this House—on Parliament, as an institution, and still a popular institution in this country, is dependent, and not upon the Government, the consideration of the vast majority of the members of this House. Do not, then, because you see a great personage giving up his opinions—do not cheer him on ; do not yield so ready a reward to political tergiversation. Above all, maintain the line of demarcation between parties ; for it is only by maintaining the independence of party that you can maintain the integrity of public men, and the power and influence of Parliament itself.

MR. MILES'S AMENDMENT, February 20, 1846.<sup>1</sup>

[On January 27, Sir Robert Peel had moved to go into Committee of the whole House to consider the question of the Corn Laws, and had explained the nature of his measures. The debate was fixed for February 9, when an amendment was moved by Mr. Miles to the effect that the House 'should go into committee that day six months.'

The debate lasted twelve nights, and ended in a majority for the Government of 97 : the Ayes being 339, the Noes 242. Of the Conservative party 112 voted with Government. Mr. Disraeli spoke on the sixth night. The reader will be struck with his remarks on the improbability of other nations becoming converts to Free Trade.]

I leave the right honourable baronet, the First Minister, to settle the question of the currency with his new supporter to whom we are indebted for a protection speech almost as effective as that delivered by the noble lord the member for Liverpool. The honourable gentleman who has just addressed us seems to think that after the declaration of the Government all is doubtful ; but there is, at least, one point on which no doubt can rest. Whatever may be the opinions of the two parties that now have entered into this great controversy on the main question before the House ; however fervent may be our convictions of the advantages of protection ; however sanguine may be the expectations of honourable gentlemen opposite of the consequences of competition, there is one point on which we are all agreed, and with respect to which there can be no misunderstanding : and it is this—that Her Majesty's ministers have changed their opinions. Whether the opinions they formerly pursued, or the opinions they are now about to follow, are the right ones, the most expedient, and the most calculated to benefit this country—this I apprehend to be the real question

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

before the House. This is the question which, with the indulgence of the House, I shall endeavour to consider; and on which I will offer some suggestions, which I hope may induce honourable gentlemen to hesitate before they accede to the great change which is proposed. I shall endeavour to show that the system of protection is not that odious system which it has so long been assumed to be. I pledge myself to meet the question on its merits; and though I may not be equal to the argument, I will not shrink from it. But before I presume to offer any considerations to the House in support of that system, it will be more convenient to notice the arguments offered by Her Majesty's Government in favour of the change proposed. We have been addressed in support of the measure of the Government by three cabinet ministers. It is due to the right honourable gentleman, the First Minister—due to his position, and to the comprehensive statement which he made of the case of the ministers, that I should, perhaps, in the first instance, notice what that right honourable gentleman said.

He seemed to complain that the greater part of this discussion had been wasted by observations on the conduct of party. I have no wish myself to enter into that subject; nor should I have noticed it, had not the right honourable gentleman, by the use which he made of the word 'party,' then, as well as on other occasions seemed to entertain on that point ideas very different from those which animate and influence gentlemen on these benches. We have, indeed, heard from these benches many comments on the conduct of party; but we associate with that word very different ideas from those which the right honourable gentleman seems to entertain. We do not understand that party is anything but public opinion embodied. We protest against the doctrine of the right honourable gentleman, that there is a distinction between political party and public opinion. We maintain that party is public opinion embodied; whether it represent the opinion of a majority or a minority, it, at all events, represents the opinion of a great section of the community. In this country, where the nation is divided into parties, and where great results are brought about by public discussion, and by the organisation also, no doubt, of material



interests—in this country, by these two agencies, reason and property, we arrive in times of change at the solution of controversies the most difficult. Such are the beneficial consequences of this system that, however fierce the controversial strife—however violent the agitation of the nation—still you will always find that when a question is settled by the legitimate influence of what the right honourable gentleman calls ‘party,’ but which is, in fact, national organisation, the nation is content and satisfied with the decision; and you seldom see a question so settled reopened. We do not complain of the right honourable baronet for having changed his opinion—opinion is not in the power of the human will; but what we complain of is, not that he has deferred too much to public opinion, but that he has outraged public opinion; that he has prevented its legitimate action in the settlement of questions by the aid of party, or embodied public opinion; and that he has arrived at a conclusion, and probably will achieve a result, which will not be, on account of the mode in which it has been brought about, satisfactory to the community. We say, and say with reason, that by the aid of that great mass of public opinion which we represent, the right honourable baronet was raised into power; and that a Parliament was elected to give effect to that opinion which we represent and the right honourable baronet has disregarded. If the noble lord opposite, who represents another section of public opinion, had succeeded and been made minister; if his side had succeeded in becoming the majority, and had settled these questions, we should then have yielded; because we should have felt that the solution of these questions had been brought about by constitutional means—by the legitimate operation of public opinion. But we feel that this question is not now settled, and cannot be settled, in a constitutional manner. It is not merely that we have the sad spectacle of the right honourable baronet surrounded by a majority, who, while they give him their votes, protest in their speeches against his policy. Is not that the fact? I thought there was no doubt about it; and that the illustrious converts we have heard of, are converts to the policy, and not to the principles, of the right honourable gentleman. There is

not only the flagrant scandal of a minister bringing forward under such circumstances a great measure, with, as he has announced himself, the majority of his cabinet against him, but public opinion is not fairly dealt with, and when we complain of the right honourable baronet not treating his party fairly, we do not speak of the 300 gentlemen on these benches, but we speak of the great body of the community whose views they represent, and of that public opinion which is the result of their convictions.

I have now made the only observations I shall offer in answer to what has fallen on this head from the right honourable baronet. The right honourable baronet then proceeded to indicate what he considered the proper subject of discussion: and I confess that he, in his description of what should be the proper subject of discussion at once described and indicated the fallacy of his own position and the fatal policy he would have us pursue. The right honourable gentleman said, 'I call on you not to discuss the party question, but—' to do what?—'to meet an emergency, and to construct a system.' Now, if there be any contrast more complete than another, it must be that between a system, which should be permanent, and an emergency, which, however managed, must to a certain degree be temporary. This was, I think, at once the blot of the position of the right honourable baronet in his very first step. If we were considering the policy of a minister of a foreign country, and if we brought to that consideration calmer spirits than now animate us, we should at once say that this was a great mistake. I say that it would be a great mistake in the noble Lord opposite, in dealing with a national emergency, were he to say, 'I have measures to meet this emergency, but at the same time I ask you to reconstruct your commercial policy in accordance with the policy I have always advocated, and for which, therefore, you are prepared.' But what would you say to a minister who, with an emergency, asks you to reconstruct your commercial system, and at the same time tells you that you must do this in total opposition to all that he has before taught you as wise and politic? Now, Sir, as regards the emergency—namely, the state of Ireland—I

must protest against anyone in this House warning us not to speak of that country in a tone of levity. I am not conscious of ever having spoken of Ireland in a tone of levity, though I may speak in a tone of levity of a feeble policy with reference to Ireland.

But before we touch upon this there is one point which it would be well for some member of the cabinet to clear up. I believe there are no more free-trade members of the cabinet to speak; but perhaps we may be favoured with the opinion of a protection member; for it is a remarkable characteristic of the present anomalous state of affairs that we have at the same time a protection cabinet and a free-trade ministry. The right honourable gentleman told us that he feels the difficulty under which he necessarily labours in himself proposing these changes in our commercial system; that he had wished these changes should be proposed by others; but at the same time he informs us that he proposed these identical measures in cabinet long before he meditated the rupture of that cabinet, or perhaps anticipated the opposition he received in it. How, then, does he reconcile the two statements? How does he reconcile the fact that he did propose these measures to the cabinet which unexpected opposition to them ultimately broke up, with the statement, recently often repeated, that he wished others had brought them forward?

I proceed, first, to notice the emergency. I say, then, that we are ready, as regards the emergency, to do all that any minister entitled to the confidence of Parliament would recommend. We are prepared to do for Ireland—I do not say, all that Ireland can desire, but all that human judgment can devise; but we don't exactly understand the position of the right honourable gentleman with respect to this subject. It has been involved in great obscurity. The right honourable gentleman says, 'I was for opening the ports.' The statement was met with a response of sympathy from these benches; and then, taking a rapid view of the economical history of the country, proving that the ports had often been opened, and beneficially opened, the right honourable baronet turned round and said, 'Yes, it is very well for you to cheer me, but although I was prepared to open the

ports, I was not prepared to shut them again.' Well, now, it seems from that, the difficulty of the right honourable gentleman was not as to opening the ports—that, under the circumstances, he would have had no difficulty about. But the difficulty lay at the bottom of his policy; the right honourable baronet had resolved that the present system of corn and provision laws should cease. Compare these facts with the declaration that has just been made by a member of the cabinet, not exactly on the hustings, but before a large body of his constituents in a Midland county—the extraordinary declaration, which I dare say attracted the attention of many, made by the Chief Secretary for Ireland.<sup>1</sup> He tells them, 'We had wished that this communication should have been made to another Parliament;' that is to say, the present Parliament might have gone on—there might have been a renewal, another seven years' lease, of the Conservative majority; and when the general election had taken place, and we had just met, we should have received the announcement which, by peculiar circumstances, has been made too soon.

Now, I am making no charge; I am throwing out hints to the protection members of the cabinet who probably may rise in the course of this debate. These are points on which we wish to have information. We want to know whether it was a foregone conclusion, and whether the Secretary for Ireland was authorised in saying that it was not intended to propose these changes until a new Parliament had assembled. We want to know whether it is a fact that, although the right honourable gentleman has more than once said that he deploras that the task has fallen on him, and wishes it had fallen to others, the right honourable gentleman, before the idea could have been conceived by any other human being, had proposed these measures in council and insisted on their adoption. These are two circumstances that require elucidation. When the right honourable gentleman first brought these measures before the notice of the House, he seemed to found them on the objection of the last three years; but in the last speech he made he found fault with that expression, and the position he then

<sup>1</sup> Lord Lincoln.

laid down was this:—‘I don’t say that it was the experience of the last three years that induced me to adopt the measures I now recommend; but, taking a general view of the commercial history of this country for a long period, I had seen, with gradual and sometimes considerable relaxations of protective duties, and especially during the last three years, under the influence of my tariff, a great simultaneous increase of exports and imports.’ I believe that is a fair statement of what the right honourable gentleman said.

Now, it is very agreeable to hear of a great increase of exports and imports, and if the right honourable gentleman had been only opening his annual budget I would not have been captious. But when a great social revolution is proposed and recommended to us, and that great change recommended on the data afforded by our exports and imports, it becomes the House to be very cautious in their conduct, and analyse very severely the conclusions from those data. Now, Sir, there is one cause with which I dare say the House, and particularly honourable members opposite, are very familiar, but which has never been mentioned in this debate, which operates extremely, and has especially operated upon the exports and imports of this year. I am throwing overboard all consideration of exuberant harvests and magnificent public works—all those features of nature and of art—which the right honourable baronet never referred to on the first occasion. I am not taking advantage of these admissions. I believe it is universally acknowledged by all persons, whatever opinion they may have upon the great question, that the basis of the right honourable gentleman’s argument was much too limited at first, and the data on which he built utterly fallacious. I throw out of consideration all these circumstances, and I put my finger upon an important agency in this question, to which I call the attention of the House. There is nothing that affects imports especially so much as the state of the seasons. Now, I will show you a case as a commercial transaction, both as regards the imports and exports, which illustrates the agency of this principle. If you look at the exports and imports this year, you will find a very great increase in both in the instance of sugar. It is impossible to suppose

that the tariff—the alteration in the sugar duties by the right honourable gentleman—could have influenced to any extent the consignments of sugar that we received, particularly from the more distant ports—from the Mauritius, for instance, and the East Indies; but there happened to be an abundant crop both in the Mauritius and the East Indies, and owing to that circumstance our imports of sugar from those parts of the world were much greater than usual, and will no doubt figure in the table to be brought forward by the right honourable baronet on some future day, in vindication of his commercial policy. Now, it is a curious circumstance that while there has been that abundant crop in the Mauritius and the East Indies, there has been a total deficiency of the crop at the Havannah. Trace, then, the influence of the seasons upon trade. All the great Russian refineries are entirely supplied by the Havannah; and what occurs? Why, Russia imported sugar from England; and thus you see, at the same time, the influence of a good season immensely increases the import of sugar from the Mauritius into this country, and the influence of a bad season in the Havannah produces a great increase in the export of sugar from England to Russia. No one will pretend that that is the consequence of the Tariff. I say it was the influence of the seasons; and the same influence may probably be traced in the exports and imports of all the great raw commodities which mainly make up our colonial transactions. I know this subject is dry and unpalatable to the House; but I feel myself bound to enter into it. I want to show the influence of the seasons upon exports and imports. Suppose, for example, you had had a very bad cotton crop in the United States, a crop as deficient as one I remember, to the extent of half a million of bales. Do you mean to say that putting an end to the paltry duty you levied upon cotton-wool would have led to the great increase in the import this year? An exuberant crop has produced an immense import. If you will look into the wool trade, you will find a great increase from the same cause; and whether it be coffee, or sugar, or wool, or cotton—these four great staple articles—the influence of the seasons upon their import must never be over-

looked. Now, at the risk of wearying the House, I must venture to notice another statement of the right honourable gentleman—one of those that he sometimes makes with his figures all ready, and with that felicitous manner that seems to augur a favourable result. The right honourable gentleman has made a battle-horse of the unfortunate silk trade. I really should have thought that the memory of the hand-loom weavers might have prevented a minister, although the most ardent votary of free trade, from putting forward the case of the silk trade. My honourable friend the member for Warwickshire has referred to that trade, and, without now alluding to details with which the House is familiar—throwing out of the calculation all that animal refuse which, compared with real silk, is as a value ranging from 2*d.* to 10*d.* per pound is to one ranging from 1*s.* to 25*s.* per pound—I beg the right honourable gentleman to contrast the import of raw silk in 1844 with the import of what may fairly be considered the last year of a protected trade. In the last year of protected trade, if my memory serves me right, we imported 4,100,064 lbs. of raw silk; that is exactly twenty-two years ago; and in 1844, after twenty years of the blessings of this relaxed protection, we imported 4,020,063 lbs.; and yet it appeared from the statement of the right honourable baronet, unless he is misreported, that the contrast he drew was between 3,000,000 lbs. under protection, and an import of 6,000,000 lbs. under a relaxed system. But suppose the increase had been such as the right honourable gentleman stated. I cannot believe for a moment that you are to ascribe all the progress in a country like England, with the untiring energies of the English nation, to the principle that may regulate your commercial code. I know that, if the country is prosperous, we are ready to allege the advantages of protection, while honourable gentlemen opposite are equally prompt to urge that the approximation we have made to liberal commerce has benefited the country. I believe, whether we had one system or the other, the country would to a certain extent flourish; though there may be much class suffering and much individual misery—the two things we wish to prevent. But the extraordinary circumstance with respect to the silk

trade is, that it has not thriven. It is the exception that is to prove the rule. If honourable gentlemen doubt my statement, they will have ample opportunities to contradict me. The fact is not very material to my argument, and I will give you a good reason why. I made these observations, because I thought them deserving of the attention of the House, and especially the effect of the seasons upon imports; but I am perfectly willing to admit the principle which the right honourable baronet has established in his last speech. Now, what is that principle? The right honourable baronet says we have been removing prohibition and relaxing protection for thirty years, and the country has been more flourishing than ever. Now, that is my case. I say that the country is flourishing because you have given to its trade a just, a judicious, and a moderate protection. But the right honourable gentleman, having proved, especially in his last exposition of the policy of Government, that by a just, judicious, and moderate protection England has flourished, turns round very calmly to us, and says, 'I am bound to acknowledge that I have changed my opinion upon this subject of protection; I am no longer in favour of it.' His whole speech, after all, only proved the advantage of protection. It can prove nothing else than the advantage of the principle of a moderate protection. ('Oh!') I am sorry, Sir, to have excited that groan from a free trader in distress. I want to ask the honourable gentleman a very important question, Does he believe that he can fight hostile tariffs with free imports? That is the point. (Hear!) 'Hear! Hear!' from the disciples of the school of Manchester! A most consistent cheer! They have always maintained they can; and if their principles are right, as they believe they are—as I believe they are not—I can easily understand that, their premises being assumed, they may arrive at that conclusion. They believe they can fight hostile tariffs with free imports, and they tell us very justly, 'Let us take care of our imports, and everything else will take care of itself.' But is that the conviction of the right honourable gentleman? We want to know that, because, if that be his conviction, why all the eulogies over defunct diplomatic negotiations to procure com-



inercial treaties? Why does the right honourable gentleman speak with so much pity and with so much pique upon the question of his diplomatic intercourse on the subject of relaxed commerce? If he believe that he can meet hostile tariffs with free imports, he need not trouble himself about commercial treaties. But if the right honourable gentleman does not believe that—if he has not the conviction of the school of Manchester—then he is not justified in offering this measure. But how can I believe that the right honourable gentleman has this conviction, which he has never enunciated, when he tells you, as one of the recommendations of this measure, that he hopes great things from a good example? If he believes in that great principle to which I have just alluded, a good example is of no importance whatever. We must have a protection minister speak upon this subject. We must have a clear declaration from the cabinet upon this important point; it is the question upon which all hinges. I conclude from the language of the right honourable gentleman that he is not quite satisfied on this head: how otherwise am I to explain his language? He tells you that Prussia already shakes; he reads to you the report of an American minister in favour of what is really free trade—an equal interchange of the peculiar products of different countries; he makes what I must consider very extraordinary statements of opinions on the subject in France, and to which my noble friend the member for Newark has very properly referred. I cannot presume to offer an opinion upon these high subjects of cabinet secrets after such declarations from the right honourable gentleman. It may be because all things are possible—that the Americans are going to change their tariff; that Prussia already shakes; that the French are votaries of free trade; but I think it my duty, with permission of the House, to offer them some facts, from which I leave them to draw their own conclusion.

In the first place we have been referred to the report of Mr. Walker, the Secretary of the American Treasury. Mr. Walker is a very respectable man; I believe—I am so informed on authority—that Mr. Walker is not interested in the protection of native industry; and I am sorry to say that in

America, for the last few years, the question what your material interest is, is almost the only line of demarcation between parties. But before you calculate upon any modification in the tariff of America, it is just as well that the House should clearly understand what is the power of the manufacturing interest—the protected interest—in America. I will not refer to that enormous volume which has already been the subject of criticism; but an American gentleman residing at Liverpool has sent me the last census of the American population. It was taken in 1840, and I believe it is the last; if there be a later one it would be rather more in my favour. Now, what do you suppose is the number of manufacturing operatives in the United States? In 1840, and since 1840—under this tariff, there has been the greatest development of manufacturing industry yet known in America—in 1840 the number of the manufacturing operatives in the United States was 800,000, a population exceeding, I believe, the manufacturing population of our four great staple manufactures in England. The honourable gentleman who is the Secretary of the Treasury there says in his report that the only interests concerned are the interests of 10,000 manufacturers. Now, the importance of an interest is to be calculated from the amount of the population employed and of the capital invested. The number of the manufacturers may be of very secondary importance; but there are 10,000 manufacturers in the United States, and I want to know how many there are in England. I know, if you look to the population returns, which were drawn up by a pen not favourable to the agricultural interest, the number of manufacturers does not appear; probably it was not convenient to mention it; but I very much doubt if there are 10,000. At any rate, see the importance of the interest you have to encounter. But that is not all; I need not dilate on the number of individuals in America who are dependent on these 800,000 operatives. But there is no agricultural State in the vicinity of these manufacturing establishments that is not in favour of protection; and for this reason, because protection gives them the benefit of a home market. Now, you have to encounter the best organised and probably the most numerous interest, in the

United States; and unless you are aware of the special circumstances in respect to the industry of the United States, it is impossible to comprehend what is going on in that country. I will give an illustration of this.

The other day I met a noble lord who was once a minister of the Crown, and a most distinguished man. He was in great trouble about the Oregon question, and said, with an expression of surprise—‘Here is the venerable Adams, who was always the advocate of peace, who has made a furious war speech!’ The noble lord was astonished at this, but he was not aware that in proportion as free trade has become popular in England, has the manufacturing or protected interest in the United States become warlike. They have discovered that war—and I am quoting the argument of a most respectable literary organ of the party, which I only read last night—that, after all, war will be the only protection for the manufacturer. Now, let me pray the House to remember the arguments which have been employed in favour of reducing the tariff for the American markets. It has always been considered a principal peacemaker—the proper way to remove the small cloud on the other side of the Atlantic. But remember that in exact proportion as you conciliate the western settlements, you will lose the affections of the great northern States, who are the most powerful part of the American community. I put this to the noble lord who has recently visited that country, and who so much interested us the other night with an account of it—I mean the noble lord<sup>1</sup> the member for the West Riding of Yorkshire—who, I must say, I rejoice to see returned to us, even though it be as the member for the West Riding. I listened to his speech with great interest; his descriptions of American landscape were admirable; all I wished was that he would have entered a little more into certain social details, have given us, for instance, an authentic revision of that famous Transatlantic melody which describes how statesmen may jump from one set of opinions to another. I have endeavoured to condense my observations on this subject; but I think they are worthy of calm consideration. I cannot say a word when I am

<sup>1</sup> Lord Morpeth.

told—oracularly told—that Prussia already shakes. I can only say that I read a book, just published, within this month, where there is no indication of this wonderful shaking. It is written by a man who, on the contrary, testifies to the most obstinate determination on the part of Prussia that this free-trade system must be uncompromisingly resisted. With respect to the Manchester people, he says that they can export at a loss; and he quotes the pamphlet of Mr. Baines, and a speech of the honourable member to that effect. He says that they can go on exporting at a loss, and thus they will swamp our [*i.e.* the Prussian] markets, so that these dangerous measures of the English Government render it necessary we should make our [*i.e.* the Prussian] tariff, if possible, more stringent. We require a more detailed account of the shaking of Prussia, and till we receive it I, for one, shall be extremely sceptical. I have, indeed, read a most mournful representation from the little State of Mecklenburg: they say they have been asked to join the Zollverein over and over again; but they have not joined it, in consequence of the remonstrances of the English Minister, to their great injury; and they say, ‘After all the sacrifices we have made, if the Zollverein are to have free importation to England, we have no advantage whatever, and the best thing we can now do is to join the Zollverein, and see what measures can be best devised to advance the cause of native industry.’

Now I come to France, and I admit I never in my life listened to anything with more astonishment than to the prospects which the right honourable gentleman held out as to France. Remember these are prospects held out by the minister, not by gentlemen of the Manchester school, who believe that they may fight hostile tariffs with free imports. He holds out these prospects, but I say without hesitation what is my conviction—and I speak with some knowledge of the public men of France—that, with the exception of an occasional statesman who attempts to humour and conciliate an English minister, I do not believe there is a leading individual in France who is not in favour of a high restrictive policy. It is a very curious circumstance which the House should bear in mind.

and my noble friend the member for Newark<sup>1</sup> has properly alluded to it—that although there is no country in the world where parties are so violent as in France—not looking merely to changes of government, but pointing to changes which make an Englishman recoil—yet you find this curious circumstance, that not only what is called the Conservative party, that which sways the Chambers, the commercial feudality—and of course interested in all the great protected interests—but the Republican party, the great object of whose struggles is not merely to get rid of a sovereign or a minister, but entirely to change the tenure of property—that party is opposed to what you call free trade as much as the commercial community. You have in France these two great interests, the politico-philosophical and the commercial, all working together against what they call the fatal principle of competition. There was but one way of ever gaining any relaxation of the mercantile system of France, and that was by diplomacy. The French cabinet will do nothing without a treaty. An opportunity for some partial interchange once offered itself, which might have benefited the cutlery of Sheffield; but that is all past.

You now propose to open your ports without condition, and France has no longer an object to negotiate for. I bring it, then, to this point, that if the right honourable baronet is not prepared to meet hostile tariffs with free imports, he has no ground to stand on. And now let us try fighting hostile tariffs with free imports. I will suppose that we have a great increase of importation from the shores of the Baltic; that, in addition to the commerce we have already with those countries, we import a great deal more. Supposing you import 5,000,000*l.* more from Russia than you ever did before, how will you make your payments if they take no more additional goods from you than they do now? Will you pay in gold? Can you? I know honourable gentlemen opposite will reply, they manage these things by means of bills, and so on; but that will not improve the case. Suppose, when you have got the 5,000,000*l.* additional from Russia, you buy Russian bills on Brazil or New York to the amount of those 5,000,000*l.*, and you thus com-

<sup>1</sup> Lord John Manners.

plete your transaction. But you have already supplied the Americans and the Brazilians with as much of your goods as they care to take, and if you want to sell still more to them, you must do so at a great sacrifice. Supposing, for instance, you send out to one of these countries 1,500,000*l.* of goods, and they only require 1,000,000*l.*, then it is clear you must sell the other 500,000*l.* at an immense sacrifice. Prices fall, profits are reduced, wages are lowered. But the system of the Government, it appears, is a comprehensive system: this process is going on at the same time in several other markets. Are you prepared to meet the effect it will have on the general distribution of the precious metals? Every year, and in every market, English labour will receive less in return of foreign articles. But gold and silver are foreign articles; and in every year and in every market English labour will have less command of gold and silver. If the precious metals become more valuable, prices must fall. But let me ask how you are to meet your taxation; how are you to meet the fixed burdens of the country if you bring on a general fall of prices in England? I confess I see little chance of assistance in the new Banking Bill of the right honourable baronet. That is a measure rather characterised by caution than security.

Now, unless the right honourable baronet is prepared to fight hostile tariffs with free imports, I repeat that he is not justified in bringing forward this measure. And now, Sir, before addressing myself to the principle of protection, I feel myself bound in courtesy to notice the speeches of two right honourable gentlemen who addressed the House during the debate. The first is the speech of the right honourable gentleman the Secretary at War; and I must say the spirit of that speech surprised me; and it was (I do not use the term offensively) a League speech—a speech which, if made at the right time, and by the proper person, and under proper circumstances, might have been received with much applause. I can easily understand how some honourable members who are situated opposite to me at this moment, who entered political life with a deep conviction of the truth of a great economical principle; who have traced, though in an exaggerated spirit, the way

evils which, according to their view, have flowed from the system to which they are opposed; I can conceive how, acting under a profound and passionate conviction of these, which I believe animates very many gentlemen of the Anti-Corn Law League—I can easily conceive their using such language. But I must say the right honourable gentleman the Secretary at War<sup>1</sup> was not the person to address this house as a martyr, when he is only a convert—I was going to say, a recent convert, forgetting that he has informed us that in 1841 he was in favour of the principles of free trade: he only objected then to the mode in which the principles were applied; the mode in which they were then applied was from the opposite side of the table.

The right honourable gentleman the Secretary at War congratulated the House upon the fact that the fallacy of cheap bread was discarded by all parties; while the Secretary of State<sup>2</sup> in his address on the following night, in answer to an appeal from my noble friend the member for Stamford, stated that unless the question before the House involved a cheaper and more abundant supply of food to the people, there was no question before them. How does the Secretary of State for the Home Department reconcile that with the speech of the Secretary at War? I am not surprised that there should be such distraction in their counsels, when there is such discordance in their speeches. The Secretary at War, also, as respects a most important interest in this comprehensive scheme—which I do not wish now more particularly to advert to, except to say that it is, in my opinion, the most important interest—the right honourable gentleman asks, what do you fear from free imports? Where are they to come from? Now, I want to avoid making a Corn Law speech; I shall have other opportunities of doing so; but at the same time, when an observation of this kind is made, I cannot allow it to pass unnoticed, for I observe that there is a coolness of assertion very prevalent on this subject.

I read a speech to-day from one whom we all respect, and

<sup>1</sup> Mr. S. Herbert.

<sup>2</sup> Sir James Graham.

whom, I believe, we may now call a noble Parliamentary victim.<sup>1</sup> Addressing the electors, he said, 'What need you care about imports? Suppose there is an importation of 1,000,000 quarters, there will be a rise of 10s. in the price.' Now, I beg to say that I have investigated the subject as much as I could, and that I have some personal experience of the corn-growing countries, and I have not the slightest doubt that when this system shall be established you will get any quantity of corn from those countries that you like. It is ridiculous to tell us that they have no capital. The gentlemen of Manchester will soon lend them some. It is idle to say they have no roads. The member for Sunderland<sup>2</sup> will soon make them some. I will say, also, that there is no fallacy so great as to suppose that prices will rise as soon as there is an established market here in proportion to the demand. This may be true in cases of an uncertain demand; but the moment you have a settled market, in exact proportion to the demand, prices will fall. This is the inevitable rule. I am prepared to support my assertion with facts, if the House will allow me. Take the article of tea, for example. The demand for tea has increased year after year, and year after year prices have fallen. Take the article of cotton as another example; for there is a great analogy between cotton and corn. I remember when there was the same discussion in America respecting the supply of cotton as we have now respecting corn; and it was maintained in a pamphlet by a member of Congress that under no circumstances could the price of cotton be less than twelve cents per pound. Well, now, the fact has turned out that ever since a regular trade in cotton was established, with scarcely an interval the price of cotton has diminished, and diminished, and diminished, till it has fallen sometimes as low as three cents per pound. You may reject my reasoning as regards corn, but until you refute my examples respecting tea and cotton, you have no right to do so. Well, now, to return to the speech of the right honourable the Secretary at War.<sup>3</sup> He asks us, What is the

<sup>1</sup> Lord Lincoln, defeated by Mr. Hildyard, the Protectionist candidate for South Notts (February 1846), by a large majority.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Hudson.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Sidney Herbert.



use of all this agitation about a mere question of the repeal of a duty on one article of imports? The right honourable gentleman forgets that last year the abolition of this article of import was 'a social revolution.' And then follows the consistent Secretary of State, and he tells us that if we refuse to pass this measure we shall bring upon England anarchy, misery, and ruin.

The right honourable baronet the Secretary of State was, it appears, very much alarmed at the end of last year in consequence of a deficiency of potatoes in Ireland. He told us so; he told us he was also alarmed in consequence of an expected deficiency in the wheat harvest of England; and he also told us that he was particularly alarmed because it might possibly bring about a state of affairs such as we had in 1842, by which he assured us he was much more alarmed than was imagined at the time. Now, I have observed that ever since the right honourable gentleman has been a minister of the Conservative cabinet, he has annually brought forward a very extensive measure, which has as regularly produced great alarm, and excited great odium in the country; and that the right honourable gentleman, alarmed at his own proceedings, has ended by withdrawing the measure. Bold in Opposition—not too scrupulous—it seems a characteristic of the right honourable gentleman that the responsibilities of office should bring to him, not prudence, but panic. And these are the ministers who turn round and say, 'You are alarmed at our measure, but you will not suffer at all except from your own panic.' Why, they are the children of panic; they are an alarmist cabinet. I know not from what cause, but fright is stamped on their every forehead—whether it arises from a deficiency of food in Ireland or a superabundance of suffrages in Lancashire. And now, if the House will permit me, I will meet the question of protection. I have not deviated from my engagement. I was bound to answer the main arguments that were offered by the Government in favour of their new system; and now I will offer a few remarks in favour of that which they would abrogate. Sir, the noble lord the member for London, in his address the other night—the tone of which, I am sure everyone felt, was alike

equal to the occasion and to himself—touched on the question of protection in the abstract. He expressed in classic language the usual economical theories on the subject—very valuable, no doubt, in themselves, and very accurate, but theories which never influenced human conduct, and which are incapable of ever doing so. Therefore, all we could admire in the address of the noble lord was the evidence it afforded of his well-read mind. Now, Sir, I don't know what the noble lord means, dealing as we are with England, and with practically existing circumstances—I don't know what he means by the protective system of this country. I don't find that in England the protective system has ever been what he described it to be—protective to every branch of native industry. I don't find that such a system as that ever existed. There was, Sir, once in England a commercial system, founded on principle, definite in its details, and, in a certain sense, beneficial in practice—I mean the colonial system. No doubt it involved some degree of protection to native industry, but it was always auxiliary to the colonial system. I am not, I assure the House, referring to these points as matters of historical curiosity, but in order to see whether it is not possible that we might come to some agreement as to what the principle of protection is. Now, we always had in England, in those good old days of which a noble friend of mine has spoken, a very liberal system of commerce with the Continent. There were propositions made at Utrecht, which were not carried into effect, for a general system of commercial communication at a very moderate duty—at 10 per cent. That was really the principle of free trade.

In the middle of the eighteenth century our foreign trade was sacrificed to the upholding of our colonial system. There is no doubt whatever that the range of our transactions in commerce was thereby curtailed; but the merchants of England were compensated by more secure markets and larger profits. But at length your colonial system deserted you; you lost your principal colonies, and then you had to lay down a new principle. It fell to the lot of Mr. Pitt to do that. His speeches, at the end of the eighteenth century, which you all have read, are a development of the real principles of free trade.

—a large system of commercial intercourse on the principle of reciprocal advantage. He told the members of this House, ‘You must no longer adhere to those old ideas derived from the colonial system, for we have no longer a colonial world to support that system. You must come forward’—(he was speaking to the manufacturers especially; for the country gentlemen, on commercial subjects, were far more docile and enlightened)—‘and give up your colonial system.’ What did Mr. Pitt do? He brought forward a new Tariff, as the right honourable gentleman did. He came down to the House and said, ‘Here is my new Tariff; these are the terms of interchange with Europe. They are liberal terms. I want to have a free intercourse; and I have entered into commercial treaties with various Powers, and I have begun with France.’ Then came your revolutionary war, which upset all this system. But the moment it was over you returned again to the principles then laid down. Mr. Huskisson and Lord Liverpool pursued the same system further, and at last we again find it recurred to by the right honourable baronet. For myself, I gave a conscientious vote for the Tariff of the right honourable baronet, as embodying a system of moderate, just, and judicious protection, one which was in complete harmony with what I think are the true commercial principles of this country. We know what a contrary policy would have effected. We are not without examples. We know what a system of absolute prohibition will accomplish; for we have the example of Spain always before us; and we know, also, there is another country where there has been a complete application, for a long term, of the system of unmitigated competition—not, indeed, from any philosophical conviction of its policy, but rather from the haughty indifference with which a race of conquerors are too apt to consider commerce. There has been free trade in Turkey for a long time; and what has it produced? It has destroyed some of the finest manufactures in the world. As late as 1812 these manufactures had existed; but they have been destroyed. Now, that was the consequence of competition in Turkey, and its effects have been as pernicious as the effect of the contrary principle in Spain. You have had the same impossibility of

aggregating capital—the same impoverishment of the people. And one of the great causes of the financial difficulties of the Porte has been, that there the effects of unbridled competition have been as pernicious as those of excessive protection in Spain.

When a great minister has to deal with the general arrangements of the commercial affairs of a country, he has two main objects to attain—first, how to employ the people; and, secondly, to secure them variety of employment, which, in case of the failure of any particular branch, may prevent their being left without resource. I think the right honourable baronet said that there was a very great difficulty in arguing against the principles of free trade, because they had a *prima facie* case in their favour. Sir, I never care much about *prima facie* cases. It would be just as easy for me to say that there was a *prima facie* case for protection as for the right honourable baronet to say that there was one in favour of free trade. To protect the industry of our fellow-subjects is certainly, *prima facie*, desirable. Well, now, the right honourable baronet has announced, officially announced, that the principle of protection is for ever relinquished by his cabinet. We think that principle a beneficial one. Mind, I don't say I am now proving it to be so. We might call on him to prove the contrary. That *onus probandi* lies on him. Nevertheless, on that ground, I will now meet the gentlemen of the Anti-Corn-Law League. I heard the able speech of the honourable member for Manchester;<sup>1</sup> I unfortunately lost the speech of the honourable member for Durham;<sup>2</sup> but I have been careful to make myself acquainted with it, as, indeed, I was bound to do. I have considered those two speeches; and I must say I cannot extract from either of them a single principle which can guide me in this maze, or a single reasonable objection to the principle of protection. I admit, however, that as those honourable gentlemen have made so many other speeches, it is not far in the way to single out an isolated one.

Now, I declare that I wish to meet their case in the fairest manner possible. I confess I have got a difficulty in doing so.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Stansfeld.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Lubbock.

because I find that the arguments of the League have perpetually changed. It is a curious fact that, although they have been working now for seven years, they commenced by promising cheap bread to the labourer, and have ended by promising high rents to the landlord. I am not stating this as a charge against the League. I can understand that if I were engaged in working out a great principle, and placed it in every possible light, I might constantly see contrary effects produced; and I willingly believe that the League all this time, when we thought they were instructing the people, have been only educating themselves. And I will tell the gentlemen of the League another reason why I am able to trace this ingenuous development of their mind. I have in my possession a printed circular, a sort of manifesto, of the Chamber of Commerce of Manchester, issued in 1839, which gives a most melancholy account of the commercial condition of England at that time. I examined that document, and I found that the panacea proposed for all these evils was a change, not in the Corn Laws, but in the currency. But you say, what is the Chamber of Commerce at Manchester to the Anti-Corn-Law League? Now, it so happens that the gentlemen who drew up that circular are the principal members of the League. If you doubt it, look upstairs, and you will see in a book which contains the evidence before your Committee on Joint Stock Banks in 1840 or 1841—I forget the year—that some of the most distinguished members of the League—some of them holding seats in this House—you will find that they then had not an idea about repeal of the Corn Laws, but that they were the sworn friends of the member for Birmingham. (Mr. Muntz: ‘No, no!’) Do you mean to say that Mr. Richard Cobden, now the member for Stockport, did not give evidence before that Committee? That he did not then trace all the evils of the country to the currency? (Mr. Muntz: ‘I do not mean to say he never did; but I never did.’) I always thought the honourable member was one of the school of Gemini.<sup>1</sup> It seems, then, the League have been considering all the great questions. Having exhausted the currency, they then turned round on the landlords. Continue the agita-

<sup>1</sup> Reference to pamphlets on the Currency published with that signature.

tion, and perhaps the next person they will attack will be the fundholder. Perhaps we are only a link in the chain; it will want a new victim; I think, therefore, we should promote the agitation, because if we promote the agitation, it may attack a new interest. But now I am going to state the case of the League against the protectionists; and I take it from the speeches delivered by members of that body. They say: 'Protection aims at two objects—to feed the people, and to employ the people. It has failed. It does not feed the people, because you are obliged to import corn. It does not employ the people, because you are obliged to send them to the towns that they may earn their bread. Therefore, protection is a failure.' Now, we say, we can feed the people, and employ the people. You may doubt our success; but though protection has failed, you must at least admit that free trade is untried. There are ancillary arguments, but can you deny that such is your main argument? No. Well, silence is consent.

Now, in the first place, have we failed in feeding the people? We have no agricultural statistics, which I deplore; but we have what are called some great facts to guide us. We know that fifty years ago the population of this country was not half of what it is at present. We know that at that time we could not feed our people; that we imported as much as one fifth part of the corn consumed. We know that now, in average years, we succeed in feeding the people, though their numbers are double what they then were; and we now supply them with food at a cheaper rate than we did then. That is a *prima facie* case in our favour. It is said protection is the bane of agriculture. I don't see how protection can be the bane of agriculture, unless you mean to assert that the agriculture of England is inferior to that of any other country. Now, I want to know where are superior systems of agriculture to be found? You will not tell me that there is a superior system of agriculture in Russia. The agriculture of that country has been described by a graceful and graphic pen, and the passage must be so fresh in the recollection of the House that I need not repeat it. I believe the agriculture of Russia remains much in the same state as it was at the time of that description.

Will you say that the agriculture of Germany is superior? I admit you may go over the world and take a small district—it may be in Flanders, or Tuscany, or Styria, in the south of Germany—where a system of agriculture may be pursued superior to the general cultivation of this country. I believe, however, that we have districts in Lincolnshire, in the Lothians, equal to any of these favoured spots. But what I want to know is, is there any breadth of land in the world capable of sustaining the population of a first-rate State, with an agriculture which can compare with that of Great Britain? You won't take me to the north of Germany. Take a rural town there, with its one shop, perhaps that of an apothecary, who sells not only drugs, but everything else. Compare that rural town in the north of Germany with the rural towns of England—the smallest rural towns of England—with their many great shops, their six or seven large establishments abounding in Manchester goods. Then you understand what is a home market. I will take a country very near this, the country of our rival and our friend—I will take France. That is a country blessed with great natural advantages—an exuberant soil, a fertile climate. It labours under none of the disadvantages which the gentlemen of the League are perpetually reminding us agriculture is exposed to in this country. There is no primogeniture, no hereditary peerage, no law of entail, and no game. I ask, is the agriculture of France to be compared with that of England? It seems, then, that under the system of protection, the agriculture of England is not so very bad. Though the population has doubled within fifty years, it has contrived to feed the people at a lower rate.

But you say that there is no application of capital to the land in this country. I deplore the want of agricultural statistics. We must make researches, and from a number of facts deduce our inference. It is quite impossible to travel over England without being convinced that there is a greater application of capital to land in this country than in any other. It is quite impossible that the fact should be otherwise. There is not an Englishman working in any of our colonies, there is not a resident at the Court of an Indian

Prince, the great object of whose ambition is not to return to England, purchase land, and become a justice of the peace, or deputy-lieutenant. Riding on elephants, surrounded by slaves, he is always dreaming of quarter sessions. The land of England is not only supported by the capitalists of England, but it is the land of that country which is the metropolis of the world. It receives the tribute of the world. You say there is a deficient application of capital to the land of England. Why, inquiries have been made, and statements, duly authenticated, are on record, which show that the imports of guano during the last two years amount in value to a million sterling, or a million and a quarter. No doubt, if you secured a mercantile profit, you might have a more organised application of capital to land. But the peculiarity is that here, where wealth has so many channels of employment, land gives no more than a return of three per cent. I have often been asked by foreigners, what is the reason why, when so many means are open for the employment of capital, people in this country should be so ready to invest their capital in land. It is what no foreigner can understand. It is your territorial constitution that has invested the possession of land with an honour peculiar to itself, and, giving to the landowner a position which is superior to that of any other class, will always secure the investment of capital in the soil of England.

Now, let me assume two events, both of which I fear are probable. I will assume, in the first place, that the present Corn Laws will be repealed; and, in the second, that after the lapse of a few years we may be involved in a European war. What will be our position? The past may guide us. I want honourable gentlemen to consider the position of England at the time of the rupture of the treaty of Amiens. At the time of the rupture of the treaty of Amiens we had a virtual free trade in corn; we had long been in the habit of receiving a large portion of our supply from the Continent, when that great war commenced which concluded with Waterloo. What was the consequence? You tell me now, what does it signify whether we are independent or not of a foreign supply? we obtained a supply even from France in time of war. I believe



in 1812 we did receive some corn from Holland and France. But if you base your theory on that isolated fact, you not only fall into error, but misapprehend the real circumstances. I affirm that you were long prevented by that war from having supplies from the Continent; and it was only by gradually obtaining the dominion of the seas that you were able to secure any. But was that all? From the absolute want of corn, England at the time offered the greatest possible inducement to investments in land. You had then all those thousands of Enclosure Acts, of which we have so often heard. You had an enormous rise of prices; wheat was 110s. the quarter; you raised loans at 110s. per quarter, and you had to pay the interest on those loans when wheat was at 55s. per quarter. Such were the unnatural excitement and subsequent depression which arose from your having neglected to secure a sufficient, or nearly sufficient, home supply of corn. Now, I want to know, remembering all these circumstances—remembering the state of England with respect to our means of subsistence, at the rupture of the treaty of Amiens; remembering, at the commencement of that terrific struggle, that this country did receive a great portion of its supply from abroad; remembering that the importation of grain from foreign countries during that struggle was never secured till we had gained the dominion of the seas, a dominion which it would rather be a proof of our patriotic spirit than our political sagacity again to count upon; remembering that in this interval there were two occasions when absolute famine was impending over England, the quartern loaf in 1812 selling at 1s. 11d.—remembering all these circumstances, which ought to warn us against being dependent on foreign supply, and seeing that still, with all her immense increase in population, England has succeeded in mainly supporting herself; remembering all this, I want to know whether it would be politic again to incur such risks, and whether it can with truth be maintained that protection is the bane of agriculture, and has failed in its first office of sustaining the population of this country?

And now I will meet the gentlemen of the League on the second point of their allegation. They say this system has

failed to employ the population. The right honourable gentleman the Secretary at War<sup>1</sup> has touched upon this delicate subject. He said, only cultivate the hills of Wiltshire, and there will be sufficient employment for the whole population of that county. I ask the right honourable gentleman why the hills of Wiltshire are not cultivated? It is a legitimate question to ask of one whose proud boast it is that he is the representative of that county; still more it is a legitimate question to ask of one descended from an illustrious family that has been long planted in its soil. On him and his, among others, rests the responsibility of the want of cultivation in that county. You talk to me of Goatacre and Bremhill; you tell me of the miserable condition of the peasantry; it is not here alone I have attempted, however weakly, to call public attention to the condition of the people; but when you come here with your cool assumptions and daring charges; when you say, 'Look at the condition of the peasantry, and see what protection has done for them,' why, I call on you for facts and dates: I ask you what was the condition of the peasantry of England before the influence of this system of protection? I say that, even with this accumulated mass of population, it was worse than that at present. I have read details of the condition of the peasantry of England, especially in the western counties, during the last years of the Revolutionary War, when we had a free importation of corn from France and Holland; I have seen descriptions of their state at that time, and in nothing was it less miserable than their present condition, except that there was then a wild and indiscriminate assistance, given by irresponsible persons in the name of poor-rate, which only sustained the wild and reckless, to the injury of the industrious and orderly. You bring forward your Goatacre meetings!

The right honourable baronet the other night compared an honourable member on this side of the House to Anacharsis Cloots. That reminds me of a story I have read of that distinguished personage, who once announced to the French Convention that a deputation had arrived from all the nations of Europe, anxious to express their gratitude to that illustrious

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sidney Herbert.

body for their visions of philanthropy, and their efforts in behalf of the human race. The Convention was impressed with awe at the solemnity of their position; the deputation appeared, introduced by Anacharsis Cloots, in appropriate costume, each one wearing the dress of his own country. The circumstance produced a great sensation throughout Paris. To the whole of Europe the wonderful event was announced, and after the deputation had been received they dined together at the Café de Paris, and probably, at night, danced at the *bal costumé* in the same carnival costumes. Now, I think the deputation from Goatacre comes from the same market. It is not because I advert to these hackneyed acts of faction that I wish to draw away your attention from the condition of Wiltshire and the western counties of England. Let them be as miserable and wretched as you say; paint the wretch who lives in a hovel, badly fed and badly clothed; admit all—but when you turn round and say, ‘Protection is the cause of this,’ I ask, Why do you not go to the manufacturing districts? Enter with me into a factory at Stockport or Manchester, and I will show you human suffering; I will show you human degradation; I will bring you to a hovel where the exhausted slave curses the life which he cannot quit. I might say, ‘Competition has done this.’ Can I, could I do this? No, because I am too well acquainted with the noble industry of the manufacturing counties to condescend to such a representation. I could point to a factory where I believe you would find people in as wretched a condition as any of those in the villages to which you refer; but I know that the industry of Lancashire is a well-ordered and a noble industry; I know that this case, though not isolated, is in truth only one of the exceptional cases of a great and beneficial system; and I would not condescend to such vile arts of faction.

If protection has given the peasant of Wiltshire 7s. a week, protection has equally given the peasant of Lincolnshire an ample remuneration for his toil. If you accept one case, you must take the other. They prove that the misery is in spite of protection, and infer, therefore, that its withdrawal might aggravate it. Well, then, we find the people employed, though

not so well as we could wish; we find their condition, in many instances, bad, but superior generally, to that of the other nations of Europe; and we cannot assent to your bold assumption that you will improve their condition by introducing foreign labour into competition with theirs, or to your second proposition, that you will elevate their character by diminishing their wages. I know how you will respond to that; that you will tell me that the wages of labour do not depend on the price of corn; those are axioms of which we have heard to weariness. I am not going to enter into that now. (Hear! Hear!) Well, then, I will enter into it. I had taken into consideration the hour of the night; but as the honourable member taunts me, I will deal with that question. I will admit, then, for the purpose of the argument, that the wages of labour are not dependent on the price of corn, but that the price of corn, as was said by the right honourable baronet, acts rather in an inverse ratio; how, then, can the price of corn injure the manufacturers? It can't increase the price of their article. The higher the price of corn the cheaper ought to be their article, because the lower are wages. But if the position which the right honourable baronet takes—and yours, for he borrowed it from you—if that position be correct, and if it be true that the wages of labour do not depend on the price of corn, suppose you have four millions of quarters imported from the Baltic, but wages are not increased—and remember, they would not be increased, because the wages of labour do not depend on the price of corn—why should the consumption be greater? And if not greater, what, then, would be the effect of importing four millions of quarters from the Baltic? If the consumption were not greater, you must substitute the four millions of quarters from the Baltic for four millions of English quarters, and at the same time you must have a proportionate displacement of the wages of labour; and then the labour so displaced must go and mix with manufacturing labour, and then according to your own principle, that the rate of wages depends on the demand and supply of labour—wages must be reduced, wages must fall. That is the dilemma in which I leave you.

Another point of great importance with reference to this question is the effect of sudden importations on our monetary system. I will not, at this late hour, trace all the consequences of the contraction of our currency, which are familiar to us all. You attribute them to the Corn Laws; we, on the other hand, say that they are owing to your system of importing corn from abroad; and you rejoin that if the trade were regular, the supply would be regular. I admit it; I will admit that if the trade were regular, the supply would be regular. In discussing this question throughout, I have endeavoured to admit as axioms the assumptions on which you rest, and I admit this one. But suppose there is a great deficiency in England at any given time, you would still, under your new system, have to import an extra supply in addition to that ordinarily imported—you would require two or three millions of quarters more than was expected; and for that you must pay in gold, and your currency be subject to the same derangement. The only difference is, that under the present system you hold out a bonus to your granaries, while, generally speaking, as soon as you have a regular supply, it will never be more than sufficient for the average demand. So that the very argument on which you rest is fatal to your case.

I have now nearly concluded the observations which I shall address to the House. I have omitted a great deal which I wished to urge upon the House, and I sincerely wish that what I have said had been urged with more ability; but I have endeavoured not to make a mere Corn Law speech; I have only taken corn as an illustration; but I don't like my friends here to enter upon that Corn Law debate which I suppose is impending, under a mistaken notion of the position in which they stand. I never did rest my defence of the Corn Laws on the burdens to which the land is subject. I believe that there are burdens, heavy burdens, on the land; but the land has great honours; and he who has great honours must have great burdens. But I wish them to bear in mind that their cause must be sustained by great principles. I venture feebly and slightly to indicate those principles, principles of high policy, on which their system ought to be sustained. First, without

reference to England, looking at all countries, I say that it is the first duty of the minister, and the first interest of the State, to maintain a balance between the two great branches of national industry; that is a principle which has been recognised by all great ministers for the last two hundred years, and the reasons upon which it rests are so obvious that it can hardly be necessary to mention them. Why we should maintain that balance between the two great branches of national industry involves political considerations, social considerations, affecting the happiness, prosperity, and morality of the people, as well as the stability of the State. But I go further: I say that in England we are bound to do more. I repeat what I have repeated before, that in this country there are special reasons why we should not only maintain the balance between the two branches of our national industry, but why we should give a preponderance—I do not say a predominance, which was the word ascribed by the honourable member for Manchester to the noble lord the member for London, but which he never used—why we should give a preponderance, for that is the proper and constitutional word, to the agricultural branch; and the reason is, because in England we have a territorial constitution. We have thrown upon the land the revenues of the Church, the administration of justice, and the estate of the poor; and this has been done, not to gratify the pride or pamper the luxury of the proprietors of the land, but because, in a territorial constitution, you, and those whom you have succeeded, have found the only security for self-government, the only barrier against that centralising system which has taken root in other countries. I have always maintained these opinions. My constituents are not landlords; they are not aristocrats; they are not great capitalists: they are the children of industry and toil, and they believe, first, that their material interests are involved in a system which favours native industry, by insuring at the same time real competition; but they believe also that their social and political interests are involved in a system by which their rights and liberties have been guaranteed: and I agree with them—I have the same old-fashioned notions.

I know that we have been told, and by one<sup>1</sup> who on this subject should be the highest authority, that we shall derive from this great struggle, not merely the repeal of the Corn Laws, but the transfer of power from one class to another—to one distinguished for its intelligence and wealth—the manufacturers of England. My conscience assures me that I have not been slow in doing justice to the intelligence of that class; certain I am that I am not one of those who envy them their wide and deserved prosperity; but I must confess my deep mortification that in an age of political regeneration, when all social evils are ascribed to the operation of class interests, it should be suggested that we are to be rescued from the alleged power of one class, only to sink under the avowed dominion of another. I, for one, if this is to be the end of all our struggles—if this is to be the great result of this enlightened age—I, for one, protest against the ignominious catastrophe. I believe that the monarchy of England, its sovereignty mitigated by the acknowledged authority of the estates of the realm, has its root in the hearts of the people, and is capable of securing the happiness of the nation and the power of the State. But, Sir, if this be a worn-out dream—if, indeed, there is to be a change, I, for one, anxious as I am to maintain the present polity of this country, ready to make as many sacrifices as any man for that object—if there is to be this great change, I, for one, hope that the foundation of it may be deep, the scheme comprehensive, and that instead of falling under such a thralldom, under the thralldom of capital—under the thralldom of those who, while they boast of their intelligence, are more proud of their wealth—if we must find a new force to maintain the ancient throne and immemorial monarchy of England, I, for one, hope that we may find that novel power in the invigorating energies of an educated and enfranchised people.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Cobden.

## THIRD READING OF THE CORN IMPORTATION BILL,

May 15, 1846.<sup>1</sup>

[Mr. Disraeli, who did not speak on the second reading of the Corn Importation Bill, spoke as follows on the third. This speech excited great enthusiasm and closed amid cheers such as have seldom been heard within the walls of the House of Commons.]

SIR, the Secretary of State, in the speech he made on the first night of this discussion, reminded gentlemen sitting on these benches, and professing opinions favourable to the protection of the industry of their country, that in the various and prolonged discussions which during late years have occurred with regard to great commercial changes they have, nevertheless, found it necessary to abandon many of the opinions they professed, and to give up many of those dogmas which they previously upheld. Sir, I acknowledge the fact; I believe that to be the necessary result of all discussion: nor can I understand the use of public discussion at all, if it be not to correct erroneous impressions, or if at the conclusion both parties are to take refuge in the cry that they have not changed a single opinion which they held before the question came under debate.

Sir, I do not claim for myself, and I think I may venture to say none of my friends around me claim, an infallibility in argument. We listen with attention and respect to every argument brought against the opinions which we advocate; and if we find that any argument thus advanced cannot be satisfactorily answered, we feel the necessity of no longer maintaining an opposite and untenable conclusion. But if this rule applies to our party, I think I could without difficulty show

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.



to the Secretary of State that it is a quality not peculiar to us. I rather imagine that some opinions loudly advocated and long ably maintained by honourable gentlemen opposite—I still address myself to honourable gentlemen opposite, for though this discussion was commenced by Her Majesty's Government I always remember who were really the originators of the ideas—I say, I think that some of the opinions formerly advocated by honourable gentlemen opposite, are now no longer upheld, and are therefore to be placed in that category of abandonment to which the Secretary of State referred.

I might begin with cheap bread. We heard a minister of the Crown, a member of the cabinet, even in this year, in this important session when all the opinions of Her Majesty's Government must doubtless be so well matured and so well considered, with all the advantages of four cabinet meetings in a week—we heard a member of Her Majesty's Government announce that the clap-trap cry of cheap bread was given up by all parties. The right honourable gentleman seemed to hold it, as his noble colleague, the Secretary for Ireland, did a few years back, as 'the fugitive cry of a dying faction.' Even the honourable member for Stockport, the highest authority on the point, announced that the cry of cheap bread had never been his. Well then, that is one great opinion abandoned. We shall presently find that there are others in the same predicament.

I believe it is no longer maintained that our Corn Laws are productive of very extraordinary fluctuations in the price of corn. And yet that was an opinion which was once very industriously disseminated in this country, one perpetually introduced into the discussions of this House, and which has unquestionably influenced the existing public opinion on the main question; yet I believe it is now admitted that the tendency neither of the present nor even of the late Corn Laws has been to produce extraordinary fluctuations in price. Well, that is another great opinion that has been abandoned.

Then we were told that these same Corn Laws were the bane of agriculture. That opinion is certainly given up. We have shown you—and you have admitted the facts—from the

evidence of the best authorities, the most intelligent valuers under the Tithe Commutation Act, and the most skilful land-agents in the country—we have shown you that in England the average produce of an acre is twenty-eight bushels of wheat. We know by a report prepared by a public commissioner that the average produce per acre in Russia is sixteen bushels; while we have evidence that the average amount in France is fifteen bushels. But I have got a document here which is very much at the service of honourable members opposite. It is the Report in 1845 of the Agricultural Society of New York, giving the average produce of sixty-nine counties in that State, and it appears from this report that the average produce of wheat per acre in the United States is fourteen bushels. Does it, then, appear from these figures that protection is indeed the bane of agriculture? These statements show that England produces more corn per acre in a great degree than any other country.

This, then, is a third opinion that has been abandoned. Again, there is another opinion which has been put forward with much pertinacity. It has been long loudly and diligently asserted that the population in this country increases in a greater ratio than its production. That opinion has been given up. You came down to the House, and told us always that the population was increasing a thousand a day, or 365,000 a year, and after your fashion you asserted the country could not feed the people. We have shown you—or rather you have shown us, for it has been one of the circumstances adduced by the minister in favour of the measure—that the price of wheat for years has regularly declined. If we divide the current century into three equal portions of fifteen years each, you will find the price of wheat lowest in the last division; so that while the population has been increasing in the ratio you allege, the means of production have been increasing in a still greater ratio: the population has been increasing in this degree, and at the same time the price of the necessaries of life has been decreasing.

There is another dogma which has also much influenced public opinion; and that is, that our Corn Laws have produced hostile tariffs. This opinion also is, I believe, now abandoned. Every day's experience assures us, whatever may be the policy

of the Government of this country, that Continental nations and manufacturing countries are not to be influenced by it. But, according to the new school of philosophy we need not dwell on this; it does not signify whether other nations are influenced by our policy or not, we are quite independent of all such considerations.

There is yet another opinion which I have observed frequently advanced in speeches out of the House; and speeches out of this House, be it remembered, have had much influence on conduct within it. It has often been urged at public meetings by the honourable member for Stockport, whose speeches I always read with attention, that the amount of freight alone would be a sufficient protection to land. The honourable member has been in the habit of assuring his audience that the average rate of freight was 10s. 6d. per quarter of corn, and that to this extent a protection was afforded to agriculture. I believe honourable gentlemen have even made the same declaration in this House; and I believe, had it been made in this House a year ago, we should all of us have believed it. Now, I doubt whether there is any freight which amounts to 10s. 6d. I doubt whether at present we pay 10s. 6d. per quarter even from Odessa. But, generally speaking, it is now universally admitted that freight is no protection at all, for it is just as expensive to transport a quarter of corn from one English port to another as to bring it from any of the contiguous foreign ports from which your chief supply is anticipated.

I will say one word on a topic which I have already touched upon lightly, because I heard a cheer from an honourable member opposite when I mentioned that the tendency of the present Corn Laws was not to produce great fluctuations in price. I do not mention these topics merely in retort to the Secretary of State, but because I think it not an inconvenient mode to clear the course of all collateral topics before I address myself to the main question. We maintain, then, with regard to the present and even the late Corn Laws, that they have not produced extraordinary fluctuation in price; on the contrary, we maintain that the fluctuation of price in England has been less than in any other country in the world. I will establish this

fact on data that are incontrovertible. Understand, I lay this down as a fact, that every country, rich or poor, in Europe or America, has in respect of the important necessary of life, grain, been subject to much greater fluctuation of price than England. Mr. Secretary Gladstone recently moved for an important return—a return which I notice is never alluded to by honourable gentlemen opposite. It is a return, from 1834 to 1840 inclusive, of the highest and lowest weekly prices of wheat per imperial quarter in most of the principal capitals of the United States. Now, I take one of these capitals, Philadelphia, because the peculiar circumstances of that capital tell the least for my argument. Philadelphia is the capital of one of the wealthiest and most populous States of the American union; and it has this peculiarity, that it is a State that does not commonly produce sufficient corn for the supply of its inhabitants. It should be observed that little or no corn or flour was imported from America into England during the first five years of this period, and that the importation in 1839 and 1840 tended to raise the low prices of these years, and so to diminish the extreme limits of their fluctuation. Philadelphia, too, is a great mart of commerce, communicating freely with every region of the world, and its corn trade is free, being subject only to a moderate fixed duty—a moderate fixed duty of 8s. 8d. per quarter. Now, Sir, what are the facts? It appears by this return of Mr. Secretary Gladstone that the average annual difference between the highest and lowest prices of wheat in Philadelphia is 47 per cent, while during the corresponding period in England it was only 33 per cent.; and while the extreme difference between the highest and lowest prices of wheat in this septennial period was 270 per cent. in Philadelphia, it was only 227 in England. And yet no septennial period could have been chosen which would have exhibited, under the operation of the Corn Laws, such extensive fluctuation of prices.

It may be objected to this return that it only gives the extreme weekly prices of wheat, and it may be possible that local and peculiar causes may have had an effect on those prices. Well then, here is a return of the average annual prices of wheat in Philadelphia from 1830 to 1838 inclusive, and I find

the difference between the highest and lowest price of wheat at Philadelphia to be 121 per cent., while the corresponding difference during the same period in England is only 69 per cent. The reports from every considerable port and corn market in Europe have been analysed, and the result I find to be of exactly the same character. But it will be urged that the prices of corn abroad are disturbed by the action of our Corn Laws, and that we cannot form a correct idea of the price of grain when trade flows in its natural course. But this will not impair our argument. The noble lord the member for Lynn has anticipated this objection, and he says:—‘I will take rye, because that is the food of the Continental people, and cannot be influenced by our Corn Laws; and I will show you equal fluctuations in the price of rye.’ Now, Sir, I also have a return of the prices of rye at Warsaw and at Dantzic. We have been told to-night that Dantzic is in favour of a fluctuating scale, but that at Warsaw they are devoted to free trade. Yet the difference in the annual price of rye, during the years from 1834 to 1839, in the market at Warsaw sometimes amounted to 149 per cent., whereas in Dantzic the difference was only 65 per cent. In all the great Prussian markets the difference during the same period between the annual prices of rye was 100 per cent. I think, therefore, we may fairly conclude that the objection urged against the system of graduated protection with regard to its producing fluctuation in prices is no longer an argument for this House. But I must remind the House that the instances which I have adduced, and the inferences which I have drawn from these instances, are under the influence of the late law, a law much more tending to fluctuation than the present. The scale of the late law was originally well devised. It was planned by Mr. Canning, but altered for the worse by the present First Minister: let it always be remembered, altered for the worse by the present First Minister. If I had taken the experience of the present scale, the result would have been still more favourable; but, the result being favourable enough, I am content with the former scale.

It seems, therefore, that some arguments have been abandoned by honourable gentlemen opposite as well as by us. It is

possible that both sides may have abandoned many important opinions without losing faith in the principles on which their respective systems are upheld. But I defy gentlemen opposite, who have had for years such free warren of sarcasm against the advocates of protection, to bring forward a catalogue of pronounced opinions on the subject which can compete with the one I have sketched, and yet left imperfect, before the House. What, then, are we to do with these opinions, these exhausted arguments, these exploded fallacies? Our great poet conceived the existence of a Limbo for exploded systems and the phantasies of the schools where we might hang up all those arguments that have served their purpose and which have turned out to be sophistries. Yes, but these are the arguments that have agitated a nation and have converted a ministry. It is all very well to say, after six or seven years' discussion, 'We have discovered them to be false and there is not a single gentleman opposite prepared to maintain them;' but these are the agencies by which a certain amount of public opinion has been brought to bear on great economical questions; that public opinion has changed the policy of a Government, and according to our belief is perilling the destinies of a great people.

Now, Sir, I must fairly acknowledge that one of those fallacies must be resuscitated by myself. Notwithstanding the high authority of the Secretary at War, notwithstanding the influential adhesion to his opinion of the still higher authority of the member for Stockport, I must raise on this occasion the cry of 'cheap bread.' I do believe the effect of the present Corn Laws is to raise the price of the necessaries of life to the community. That is my opinion. But I believe, and I think I can show, that they increase in an infinitely greater ratio the purchasing powers by the community of the necessaries of life. I hope I am meeting the argument fairly. The Secretary of State did me the honour to say that I had on another occasion fairly expressed the question at issue; and I wish strictly to address myself to it. Now, how am I to prove my proposition? The first witness I shall call is a high authority. It is a work circulated under the immediate authority of that great commercial confederation, the power of which is acknowledged, written,

I believe, by a gentleman who was once a member of this House, and, I believe I may add, who would have been a member of this House now if I had not had the pleasure of beating him in the first election I won—Colonel Thompson. In his ‘Corn Law Catechism’ it is maintained that the Corn Law is a tax upon the community, because, assuming a certain number of quarters of corn are produced every year in this country—say, for instance, fifty millions of quarters—the Corn Law, by artificially raising the price of that corn 1s., 8s., or 10s. per quarter, on an average acts as a tax on the community, we will say, of 20,000,000*l*. Another economist, an equally celebrated and more successful free trader, has fallen foul of the calculations of this work, which is a great authority with the Anti-Corn-Law League, and he has shown the gallant calculator that he has omitted to deduct the number of quarters that are required for seed, for the sustenance of the agriculturists themselves, for the support of their horses; and so at once the critic cut down the estimate of the Colonel to a tax of nine or ten millions on the public. But I will give, as is my custom, an advantage to my opponents, and take the first calculation. The conclusion of the Colonel, and of the school of which he is so distinguished a champion, is, that it is better for England not to raise a single quarter of corn, and then the whole of this tax might thus be saved. You will say this is an extreme statement; but the statement is not mine, and an extreme case tests the truth of a principle. Let us suppose, then, that England imports fifty millions of quarters of corn: let us suppose that she thus saves ten or twenty millions of taxation. We will admit it for the purpose of discussion. But you cannot deny that England has lost the wages of labour that would have produced these fifty millions of quarters; you cannot deny that England has lost the rent that this cultivation would have afforded after paying those wages of labour and furnishing these profits of capital. What is their united amount? It would be a light estimate to place it at twenty times that of the imaginary tax. In the proportion that united amount bears to the assumed tax the purchasing power of the community created by the law exceeds the tax on the community alleged to be occasioned by the law.

I am ready to acknowledge that the honourable member for Stockport never addressed any public assembly with these opinions. He is a practical man: he knows very well there is no chance of changing the laws of England with abstract doctrines, and he says very properly, 'I don't admit your conclusion. We don't suppose any land will be thrown out of cultivation; there may be a reduction of price or not; but what we say is, you are creating that artificial price for the first necessities of life in the country, and you are creating that artificial price for the benefit of a class; and therefore the reduction of price is, at the worst, the destruction of rent.' That is the position he takes up. Now, for my own part, I see no difference between a territorial class and the handloom weavers. If you show me that there is a law kept up merely to give a revenue to any class in this country, and that by putting an end to that law the great mass of the people can be fed better and be as well employed, I cannot imagine anything like a Corn Law can be maintained. Well then, we are brought to the gist of the question. Will this change occasion a great displacement of labour? And if so, can you supply new employment for those who are displaced? It seems to me, Sir, impossible to arrive at any conclusion on this head, unless we form some estimate of the probable price of corn in this country after the measures of the ministry have fairly come into play. It is vain to make this inquiry of the right honourable gentleman, and therefore we must be thrown on our own elements of calculation.

If we can show to you that for the future the price of corn must necessarily be such as to render it impossible in the greater part of this country to cultivate wheat or other grain with a profit, you must acknowledge there will be a great displacement of labour. We will endeavour to meet you with facts, and protest against your answering us with assumptions. I will not trouble the House by referring to those countries whose names have been long so familiar in these debates; if I allude to them it is only because I do not wish the House to suppose that I depreciate the productive power of these countries.

My honourable friend the member for Somersetshire said that the surplus produce of Russia was 28,000,000 quarters



of corn ; whereupon the Secretary of State rose to express his incredulity, amid the sympathising derision of gentlemen opposite. Why, Sir, the authority for that statement is the officer of the Government—(loud cheers)—the functionary who is employed by you to analyse the tariffs and resources of foreign countries, and probably the Secretary of State is the minister who laid his Report on the table of the House. The authority is Mr. McGregor. I allude to it in passing—not that I value the authority of Mr. McGregor a rush—but it is right that it should be known that the statement of my honourable friend was derived from your own Blue Books, and prepared by one of your own officers. What is the object of publishing these Blue Books except to furnish us with the elements of opinion ?

I will not, however, enter into the Empire of All the Russias : I know that it contains about twenty principalities, that more than one of these has an area greater than the United Kingdom, and that every one produces corn. I cannot forget the rich valley of the Volga, or the exuberant plains of the Ukraine. I won't take you to the valley of the Mississippi, though I have a statement here made by a high authority on this subject, who declares that its produce may be indefinitely extended, and that its wheat can be supplied, with a high estimate for freightage, in London at 30s. per quarter. But what I wish to bring before the notice of the House are the markets that are never mentioned, but which I believe will exercise a high influence on the price of corn. There is one market which has never been mentioned in the course of these discussions, and that is Hungary. Hungary is a plain which consists of 36,000 English square miles. It is the richest soil in the world ; the soil of a garden varying in depth from one foot to seven feet. You may go hundreds of miles together and not find a stone in it. If you deduct one-third of that area for morasses, there are 24,000 square miles of the most fertile soil in the world under the influence of a climate admirably adapted to the growth of corn. I have had a return sent to me of the production of one province in 1844—12,000,000 bushels : in Croatia the produce was 1,500,000 quarters. Yet thousands upon thousands of acres are uncultivated. But honourable gentlemen will say, how are

we to get this corn from Hungary? That is what I am going to tell you.

Here is a letter from the greatest corn-merchant in Hungary. He lives at Sisseck on the Swave, the great corn depôt of the corn trade of that country. I will not give you the prices of this year, which is a year of scarcity, but I will give you the average of the last five years. An English quarter of Hungarian wheat—which, it should be remembered, ranks with the highest classes of Dantzic wheats, costs in English money from 18s. to 20s. per quarter. It is sent from Sisseck by the river Kulpa to Carlstadt for 4*d.* per quarter, and from Carlstadt by land for 1s. 8*d.* per quarter. The person who gives this information is a practical man. He says. ‘Only give me a regular trade with England and I will send you from Sisseck 500,000 quarters in the first year.’ I will soon show you what is the effect of a steady market on increased supply and decreased price.

I will take another market, a very interesting one—that of the Danubian provinces. In the year 1842 at the two ports of the Danube, Galatz and Ibrail, there were 1,350 ships laden with the produce of those countries, and only eight of them were English. That is a remarkable fact. We are the greatest commercial country in the world, and yet, in an active scene of commerce where an almost absolute freedom of trade is enjoyed, it appears by a return dated since the accession of the present Government to office, that out of 1,350 merchant ships laden in the two ports of the Danube, only eight were English. A house at Galatz has written to a house in England on the subject of supplying this country with corn, and the writer says:—‘I will undertake to lay down, if secured a price of 18s. per quarter, in any English port 200,000 quarters of wheat from this particular district, at from 28s. to 30s.; but if you will secure me a certain market, I will double that quantity next year.’ From the same place another house asserts that if you will ensure a regular trade they can supply 1,000,000 quarters of wheat at 18s. per quarter; and if this measure passes, they undertake at the end of seven years that that quantity shall be doubled and sent to England at a reduced price. I speak of



had met. What was the answer I received? Here it is:—‘I hand you enclosed the price per pound of sound common Congou tea, which is the sort most consumed in this country, from which you will be able to observe that there has been a great fall in the price since the year 1831.’ What, then, was that fall in price per pound of Congou tea—the sort most consumed in this country? In the year 1831 Congou tea was 2s. 2d. per pound; in the year 1846 it is 9d. per pound. I know very well that the price of tea in 1831 was to a certain degree artificial. The mercantile influence of the Honourable East India Company still prevailed, and the supply was limited. But that influence was not greater than that of the China War, and, it will be observed, those disturbances only affected the market for a couple of years. In 1832, tea was 2s. 1½d.; in 1833, 1s. 11d.; 1834, 1s. 7½d.; 1835, 1s. 4d.; 1836, 1s. 1d.; 1837, 1s. 7d.; 1838, 1s. 2d. And then we come to the disorders in China, which had the effect of raising the price in 1839 to 2s. 5d.; it then fell in 1842 to 1s. 3½d.; 1843, to 11d.; 1844, to 10d.; 1845, to 9½d.; until in 1846 we find it reduced to 9d. per pound; and all this time the import of tea from that country, which, from its being solely produced there, enjoys a quasi-monopoly, was increasing by millions of pounds. And then, Sir, I am told that by the last accounts from Canton the price of tea is rising; and that is called an answer. Why, Sir, if by the last accounts from Canton the price of tea had been falling, I should not have adduced that as an argument in favour of the principle I am upholding. The price of tea will fall and will rise according to the circumstances of the market: there must always be undulation in price. But the question is what, if I may use the expression, is the gradient of price—what the inevitable and unmistakeable tendency of price during a series of years?

The next instance I shall take is one which is more favourable to our case, but at the same time strictly legitimate. It is one which bears more analogy to corn—namely, cotton. The price of cotton upland per pound in the year 1836 was 10¾d.; in 1837, 8d.; 1838, 8¼d.; 1839, 6¾d.; 1840, 6½d.; 1841, 5¾d.; 1842, 5¼d.; 1843, 5½d.; 1844, 4½d.; and in 1845, from 4d.

to  $4\frac{1}{2}d.$  per pound; and in these ten years of progressive fall in price the import of cotton into England had risen from 350,000,000 pounds to 597,000,000 pounds, while, during the same period of a falling price, other manufacturing countries, including the United States, had increased their consumption of that article from 282,000,000 pounds to 439,000,000 pounds.

It seems, therefore, to be demonstrable that where there is no artificial or natural cause to check the progress of production, prices will proportionately fall. Now, in the article I am about to refer to there are these causes in operation, and the whole state of the sugar trade is so anomalous that I might fairly have omitted it from the application of the test. But it occurred to me that it might be tried with reference to the production of East India sugar since the duties were equalised. What is the result? At the end of the year 1841, the price of brown Bengal sugar was 47s. to 52s.; 1842, 45s. to 51s.; 1843, 47s. to 55s.; 1844, 39s. to 49s.; 1845, 38s. to 42s.; 1846, 37s. to 42s.; and with that falling price the amount imported increased from 24,000 tons in the first year to 62,000 tons in the last year. With respect to the price of the same sugar the price fell from 69s. to 74s. down to 52s. to 56s. during the same period. Therefore, the instance of sugar is in perfect harmony with the general and ruling principle I have laid down.

The case of coffee I find to be still more satisfactory. I must apply my rule again to East India production in this case, owing to the anomalous state of our West India colonies. Let us, then, take Ceylon coffee, and we shall find that the importation has greatly increased. The price of that article in 1840 was, per bag, 90s. to 94s. 5d.; in 1846, it fell to 44s.; and in the first year the quantity imported was 53,000 bags; in the last year, 133,000 bags. Then take the case of Mysore coffee during the same time. In the first year the price was 70s. to 80s. per cask; in the last year, 36s. to 48s. per cask; the quantity imported being in the former year 48,000 casks, in the latter, 65,530. There are many other important articles which it would be wearisome to refer to in detail, but which I mention that gentlemen may have an opportunity of investi-

the labour of England that produces corn, in order, on an extensive and even universal scale, to permit the entrance of foreign corn into this country—produced by foreign labour! Will that displaced labour find new employment? The Secretary of State says that England is no longer an agricultural but a commercial and manufacturing country, and the right honourable gentleman, when reminded by the noble lord the member for Gloucestershire of his words, said, ‘No, I did not say that; but I said that England was no longer an agricultural country.’ Why, Sir, the commerce of England is not a thing of yesterday; it is more ancient than that of any other existing country. This is a novel assumption on the part of the Government, to tell us that England has hitherto been a strictly agricultural country, and that now there is a change and that it is passing into a commercial and manufacturing country. I doubt whether, in the first place, England is a greater commercial country now than she has been at other periods of her history. I do not mean to say that she has not now more commercial transactions, but that with reference to her population, and the population of the world, her commerce is not now greater than at other periods of her history: for example, when she had her great Levantine trade; when the riches of the world collected in the Mediterranean; when she had her great Turkey merchants and her flourishing Antilles, and her profitable though in some degree surreptitious trade with the Spanish main. But then it is also said that England has become a great manufacturing country. I believe, Sir, if you look to the general distribution of labour in England, you will find she may be less of a manufacturing country now than she has been. Well, I give you my argument: answer it if you can. I say, looking to the employment of the people, manufacturing industry was more scattered over the country a hundred years ago than it is now. Honourable gentlemen have laid hold of a word uttered in the heat of speaking. I say, manufacturing industry was more dispersed over the country then than now: there were more counties in which manufactures flourished than at the present moment. For instance, in the west of England manufactures were more flourishing: and your woollen manufacture

bore a greater ratio in importance to the industrial skill of Europe 300 years ago than it does to the aggregate industry of Europe at the present moment. That manufacture might not have been absolutely more important; but as a development of the national industry it bore a greater relative importance to the industry of Europe then than at the present moment. You had then considerable manufactures in various counties—manufactures a hundred years ago which are now obsolete or but partially pursued. You have, no doubt, now a gigantic development of manufacturing skill in a particular county which is unprecedented. It is one of those developments which confer the greatest honour on this country; which has been a great source of wealth—a development of which England should be justly proud—but, generally speaking, it is confined to one county. And now ministers tell us we must change our whole system, because, forsooth, England has ceased to be an agricultural country, and has become a commercial and manufacturing one. That is to say, that we must change our whole system in favour of one particular county. Sir, that is an extremely dangerous principle to introduce. I have heard of a repeal of the Union, but we may live to hear of a revival of the Heptarchy if Her Majesty's ministers pursue this policy—if those portions of the country which are agricultural or suffering under the remains of an old obsolete manufacturing population are to be told that we must change our whole system because one county, where there is a peculiar development of one branch of industry, demands it. But what are the resources of this kind of industry to supply and support the people, supposing the great depression in agricultural produce occur which is feared: that this great revolution, as it has appropriately been called, takes place—that we cease to be an agricultural people—what are the resources that would furnish employment for two-thirds of the subverted agricultural population, in fact from 3,500,000 to 4,000,000 of people? Assume that the workshop-of-the-world principle is carried into effect; assume that the attempt is made to maintain your system both financial and domestic, on the resources of the cotton trade; assume that, in spite of hostile tariffs, that already gigantic industry is

doubled—a bold assumption, even if there be no further improvements in machinery, further reducing the necessity of manual labour—you would only find increased employment for 300,000 of your population. Perhaps mechanical invention may reduce the number half, and these only women and children. What must be the consequence? I think we have pretty good grounds for anticipating social misery and political disaster.

But then, I am told, immense things are to be done for the agriculturist by the application of capital and skill. Let us test the soundness of this doctrine. When a man lends me capital, he looks to the security he is to have and to what is to pay the interest. Is the complexion of these measures such as to render men more ready to lend money on landed estates? The mortgagee, when he advances money on land, looks to the margin in the shape of rent for his security. Will any man rise and maintain that the tendency of those measures is to increase that margin? But you are not only diminishing the opportunity of obtaining loans on your own estates, but you are creating for capital an investment which will be more profitable for it in the estates of the foreigner. Look at the relations in which you will place the foreign merchant with his London correspondent. He has no longer to fear the capricious effects of the sliding scale; he has got a certain market; he goes to his London banker with an increased security for an advance; he obtains his loan with ease: he makes his advances to the country dealers on the Continent as he makes his advance of English capital now in the foreign wool-trade between the clip and the great fairs; and thus while you diminish the security of the landed proprietor you are offering to the English capitalist a better and securer interest and investment.

But then you tell us of the aid to be had by the agriculturist from skill. It is not easy to argue on a phrase so indefinite as skill, but I think I can show you that the English agriculturist is far more advanced in respect to skill than even the English manufacturer. I don't mean to say that there are not English farmers who might cultivate their lands better and



with more economy than they do ; but the same may surely be said in their respective pursuits of many a manufacturer and many a miner ; but what I mean to say is, that an English farmer produces more effectively and wastes less, is more intelligent and more industrious, than the manufacturer. I will prove this by the evidence of a member of the Anti-Corn Law League—Mr. Grey. Mr. Grey says that the competition is so severe that he almost doubts the possibility of the English manufacturer long maintaining that competition with the Continental or American manufacturer, who approach them nearer every day in the completeness of their fabrics and the economy of their productions. But no such thing can be said of the English agriculturist who, I have shown you, can produce much more per acre than the French, Russian, or American agriculturist. So much, then, for the argument with respect to skill.

There is one argument, or rather appeal, which I know has influenced opinion out of this House, and also within it. You bring before us the condition of the English peasant. It is too often a miserable condition. My honourable friend the member for Shaftesbury has gained and deserves great credit for investigating the condition of the Dorsetshire labourer. He has introduced it into this discussion. Now, the condition of the Dorsetshire labourer is one of the reasons which induce me to support this law. It is very easy to say that the condition of the agricultural labourer, when compared with the general state of our civilisation, is a miserable and depressed one, and that protection has produced it. If I cannot offer you reasons which may induce you to believe that protection has nothing to do with it, I shall be perfectly ready to go to-night into the same lobby with Her Majesty's ministers. I asked you the other night, if protection has produced the Dorsetshire labourer at 7s. per week, how is it that protection has produced the Lincolnshire labourer with double that sum? I do not say that is an argument: it is a suggestive question which I will endeavour to follow up.

Mr. Huskisson made an observation in conversation with an acquaintance of mine which has always struck me very forcibly.

When Mr. Huskisson first settled in Sussex, his attention was naturally drawn to the extraordinary state of pauperism in that county, and after giving the subject all the meditation of his acute mind, he said that he traced it to the fact that Sussex had formerly been the seat of a great iron trade, and that agriculture had never been able to absorb the manufacturing population. Now, apply that principle to the western counties, and don't you think it will throw some light upon their condition? They also have been the seat of manufactures, many of them obsolete, and many of them only partially pursued. There, too, you will find that the manufacturing population has never been absorbed by the agricultural—that is, agriculture does not bear its ratio in its means of support to the amount of the population which it has to sustain, but which it did not create.

And now go to Lincolnshire. I will rest our case on Lincolnshire. It is a new county; it is a protected county. Lincolnshire is to agriculture what Lancashire is to manufactures. The population there is produced by land and supported by land in the same manner that the population of Lancashire has been produced and is supported by manufactures. Let us picture to ourselves for a moment that celebrated tower that looks over that city which my gallant friend<sup>1</sup> and his ancestors have represented since the time of the last Stuart. Let us picture him for a moment placing the archfiend of political economy in that befitting niche, and calling his attention to the surrounding landscape. To the north, extending to the Humber, an endless tract of wolds rescued from the rabbits, once covered with furze and whins, and now with exuberant crops of grain; to the south, stretching for miles, is what was once Lincoln Heath, where in the memory of living men there used to be a lighthouse for the traveller, and which even in the recollection of the middle-aged was let to the warrener at 2s. 6d. an acre—now one of the best farmed and most productive corn districts in the kingdom. Then, turning from the wolds and the heaths eastward reaching to the sea, he might behold a region of fens, the small ones drained by the steam engine, with the East and West

<sup>1</sup> Colonel Sibthorpe.

and Wildmore fens, once more than half the year under water, now cleared by large canals, and bearing magnificent wheat and oats; with the great Witham and Black Sluice drainage—districts, one extending over 60,000 and the other over 90,000 acres, admirably reclaimed and drained, and bearing, and creating, and well sustaining a large and industrious and thriving population. And all under the faith of protective Acts of Parliament. I am told that it is the contiguity of manufactures that makes Lincolnshire so prosperous. But, Sir, the frontiers of Wilts are nearer that great manufacturing district of which Birmingham is the centre than those of Lincoln are to Lancashire. Now, see what Lincolnshire has produced under protection: there you see the protective system fairly tested. But when you find the labourers in the western counties wretched and miserable, do not say that protection has been the cause of it when protection is perhaps the reason why they exist at all; but see if you cannot find other causes for their poverty, and means to counteract it. I must say that nothing astonished me more than when the noble lord the member for Falkirk<sup>1</sup> asked the farmers in Newark market, ‘What has protection done for you?’ Why, that market is supplied with the wheat of Lincoln Heath, the intrinsic poverty of whose soil is only sustained by the annual application of artificial manures, but which produces the finest corn in the kingdom. What has protection done for them? Why, if protection had never existed, Lincolnshire might still have been a wild wold, a barren heath, a plashy marsh.

There are one or two points to which I could have wished to call the attention of the House, but which time will only permit me to glance at; I will not presume to discuss them. But you cannot decide this question without looking to your colonies. I am not one of those who think it the inevitable lot of the people of Canada to become annexed to the United States. Canada has all the elements of a great and independent country, and is destined, I sometimes believe, to be the Russia of the New World. The honourable and learned member for Bath,<sup>2</sup> in answering the speech of the noble lord the member

<sup>1</sup> Lord Lincoln.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Roebuck.

for Lynn,<sup>1</sup> last night treated our commerce with Canada very lightly, rather as a smuggling traffic than legitimate commerce. That is an argument for keeping the Canadas. I have no desire to see a smuggling trade if we can have any other. But I will ask the gentlemen of Manchester to consider what may become of the transatlantic market for their manufactures if the whole of that continent belong to one Power? But I must not dwell on the colonies, and I shall scarcely touch the case of Ireland: it is too terrible, especially if there be truth in the opinion of the noble lord whose conversion has been so much a matter of congratulation to the Government, that their measures must be fatal to small farmers. Why, Ireland is a nation of small farmers. There was, however, one observation made by the honourable member for Stockport, which, considering the effect it has had, I cannot help noticing. The honourable gentleman says, 'Ireland an argument in favour of the Corn Laws! Of all countries in the world, I never should have supposed that Ireland would have been brought forward in support of the Corn Laws!' That is a saucy and gallant sally; but is it an argument? What does it prove? The population is reduced to the lowest sources of subsistence. Admitted: but how do they gain even their potato except by cultivating the soil, and by producing that wheat and those oats which they send to England? I should be very glad if that wheat and those oats remained in Ireland; but, I ask, what will be the state of Ireland if the effect of that measure on your market be such as I have assumed? You say that capital will flow into the country and that manufactures will be established. What length of time will elapse before these manufactures are established? Perhaps before that time the iron trade will revive in Sussex, or we shall see the drooping energies of the Dorsetshire labourer revived by his receiving the same wages as are paid at Rochdale and Stockport.

Believing that this measure would be fatal to our agricultural interests; believing that its tendency is to sap the main energies and springs of our manufacturing prosperity; believing that from a merely financial point of view it will occasion a new distribution of the precious metals, which must induce the utmost

<sup>1</sup> Lord G. Bentinck.

social suffering in every class, I am obliged to ask myself, if the measure be so perilous, why is it produced? Sir, I need not ask why so many gentlemen, both in and out of this House, have already asked, what was there in the circumstances of this country to authorise the change? If we are only a commercial and manufacturing people, all must admit that commerce was thriving and that manufactures flourished. Agriculture was also content, and even had it been suffering and depressed, what does it signify, since England has ceased to be an agricultural country? Obligated, then, to discover some cause for this social revolution, I find that a body of men have risen in this country eminent for their eloquence, distinguished for their energy, but more distinguished, in my humble opinion, for their energy and their eloquence than for their knowledge of human nature or for the extent of their political information. Sir, I am not one of those who here or elsewhere, in public or in private, have spoken with that disrespect which some have done of that great commercial confederation which now exercises so great an influence in this country. Though I disapprove of their doctrines, though I believe from the bottom of my heart that their practice will eventually be as pernicious to the manufacturing interest as to the agricultural interests of this country, still I admire men of abilities, who, convinced of a great truth and proud of their energies, band themselves together for the purpose of supporting it, and come forward devoting their lives to what they consider to be a great cause. Sir, this country can only exist by free discussion. If it is once supposed that opinions are to be put down by any other means, then, whatever may be our political forms, liberty vanishes. If we think the opinions of the Anti-Corn-Law League dangerous; if we think their system founded on error and must lead to confusion, it is open in a free country like England for men who hold opposite opinions to resist them with the same earnestness, by all legitimate means—by the same active organisation, and by all the intellectual power they command. But what happens in this country? A body of gentlemen, able and adroit men, come forward and profess contrary doctrines to those of these new economists. They place

themselves at the head of that popular party who are hostile to the new ideas, and professing their opinions, they climb and clamber into power by having accepted, or rather by having eagerly sought, the trust. It follows that the body whom they represent, trusting in their leaders not unnaturally, slumber at their posts. They conclude that their opinions are represented in the State. It was not for us or for the millions out of the House to come forward and organise a power in order to meet the hostile movements of the honourable member for Stockport. No, we trusted to others—to one who, by accepting, or rather by seizing, that post, obtained the greatest place in the country, and at this moment governs England. Well, Sir, what happens? The right honourable gentleman the First Minister told his friends that he had given them very significant hints of the change of his opinions. He said that even last year Lord Grey had found him out, and he was surprised that we could have been so long deluded.

Sir, none of the observations of the right honourable gentleman applied to me. More than a year ago, I rose in my place and said that it appeared to me that protection was in about the same state that Protestantism was in 1828.<sup>1</sup> I remember my friends were very indignant with me for that assertion, but they have since been so kind as to observe that instead of being a calumny it was only a prophecy. But I am bound to say, from personal experience, that, with the very humble exception to which I have referred, I think the right honourable baronet may congratulate himself on his complete success in having entirely deceived his party, for even the noble lord the member for Lynn himself in a moment of frank conversation assured me that he had not till the very last moment the slightest doubt of the right honourable gentleman. The noble lord, I suppose, like many others, thought that the right honourable gentleman was, to use a very favourite phrase on these benches in 1842, ‘only making the best bargain for them.’ I remember when the Whig budget was rejected and the right honourable gentleman was installed into office, the changes which he proposed at the time created some suspicion; but all

<sup>1</sup> March 17, 1845. Cf. page 80.

suspicion was hushed at the moment, because the right honourable gentleman was now looked upon as the man who could make the 'best bargain for his party.' I want to know what gentlemen think of their bargain now. Suddenly, absolute as was the confidence in the right honourable gentleman, the announcement was made that there was to be another change: that that was to occur, under his auspices, which only a few months before he had aptly described as a 'social revolution.' And how was that announcement made? Were honourable gentlemen called together, or had the influential members of either House any intimation given to them of the nature of it? No, Sir. It was announced through the columns of a journal<sup>1</sup> which is always careful never to insert important information except on the highest authority. Conceive the effect of that announcement on foreign countries and on foreign ministers. I can bear witness to it: I happened to be absent from England at the time, and I know of great potentates sending for English ambassadors and demanding an explanation: and of English ambassadors waiting on great potentates and officially declaring that there was not the slightest truth in the announcement. And all this time, too, members of the Government—I have some of them in my eye—were calling on other newspapers devoted to the Government and instructing them that the whole was an 'infamous fabrication.'<sup>2</sup> How ingenious was the conduct of Her Majesty's Government—or of that minister who formed the omnipotent minority of the cabinet, I leave the House to decide. But was it not strange that, after so much agitation, after all these Machiavellian manœuvres, when the minister at last met the House and his party, he acted as if we had deserted him instead of his having left us? Who can forget those tones? Who can forget that indignant glance?

Vectabor humeris tunc ego inimicis eques :  
 Mæque terra cedet insolentiæ :

which means to say, 'I, a protectionist minister, mean to govern England by the aid of the Anti-Corn-Law League; and

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, Dec. 4, 1845.

<sup>2</sup> *Standard*, Dec. 5, 1845.

as for the country gentlemen, why, I snap my fingers in their faces.'

Yet even then the right honourable gentleman had no cause to complain of his party. It is very true that on a subsequent occasion 240 gentlemen recorded their sense of his conduct. But then he might have remembered the considerable section of converts that he obtained even in the last hour. Why, what a compliment for a minister—not only to vote for him, but to vote for him against your opinion and in favour of opinions which he had always drilled you to distrust! That was a scene, I believe, unprecedented in the House of Commons. Indeed, I recollect nothing equal to it unless it be the conversion of the Saxons by Charlemagne, which is the only historical incident that bears any parallel to that illustrious occasion. Ranged on the banks of the Rhine, the Saxons determined to resist any further movement on the part of the great Caesar; but when the Emperor appeared, instead of conquering he converted them. How were they converted? In battalions—the old chronicler informs us they were converted in battalions, and baptised in platoons. It was utterly impossible to bring these individuals from a state of reprobation to a state of grace with a celerity sufficiently quick. When I saw the hundred and twelve fall into rank and file I was irresistibly reminded of that memorable incident on the banks of the Rhine.

And now, Sir, I must say in vindication of the right honourable gentleman that I think great injustice has been done to him throughout these debates. A perhaps justifiable misconception has universally prevailed. Sir, the right honourable gentleman has been accused of foregone treachery—of long-meditated deception—of a desire unworthy of a great statesman, even if an unprincipled one—of always having intended to abandon the opinions by professing which he rose to power. Sir, I entirely acquit the right honourable gentleman of any such intention. I do it for this reason, that when I examine the career of this minister, which has now filled a great space in the Parliamentary history of this country, I find that for between forty and fifty years, from the days of Mr. Horner to those of the honourable member for Stockport, that right



honourable gentleman has traded on the ideas and intelligence of others. His life has been one great Appropriation Clause. He is a burglar of others' intellect. Search the index of Beatson from the days of the Conqueror to the termination of the last reign, there is no statesman who has committed political petty larceny on so great a scale. I believe, therefore, when the right honourable gentleman undertook our cause on either side of the House that he was perfectly sincere in his advocacy; but as in the course of discussion the conventionalisms which he received from us crumbled away in his grasp, feeling no creative power to sustain men with new arguments, feeling no spontaneous sentiments to force upon him conviction, the right honourable gentleman—reduced at last to defending the noblest cause, one based on the most high and solemn principles, upon 'the burdens peculiar to agriculture'<sup>1</sup>—the right honourable gentleman, faithful to the law of his nature, imbibed the new doctrines, the more vigorous, bustling, popular and progressive doctrines, as he had imbibed the doctrines of every leading man in this country for thirty or forty years, with the exception of the doctrines of Parliamentary Reform which the Whigs very wisely led the country upon and did not allow to grow sufficiently mature to fall into the mouth of the right honourable gentleman.

Sir, the right honourable gentleman tells us that he does not feel humiliated. Sir, it is impossible for anyone to know what are the feelings of another. Feeling depends upon temperament: it depends upon the idiosyncrasy of the individual: it depends upon the organisation of the animal that feels. But this I will tell the right honourable gentleman, that, though he may not feel humiliated, his country ought to feel humiliated. Is it so pleasing to the self-complacency of a great nation, is it so grateful to the pride of England, that one who from the position he has contrived to occupy must rank as her foremost citizen, is one of whom it may be said, as Dean Swift said of another minister, 'that he is a gentleman who has the perpetual misfortune to be mistaken'? And, Sir, even now, in

<sup>1</sup> The words in inverted commas were uttered in a tone of sarcasm which elicited very great laughter.

this last scene of the drama, when the party whom he unintentionally betrayed is to be unintentionally annihilated—even now, in this the last scene, the right honourable gentleman, faithful to the law of his being, is going to pass a project which I believe it is matter of notoriety is not of his own invention. It is one which may have been modified, but which I believe has been offered to another Government and by that Government has been wisely rejected. Why, Sir, these are matters of general notoriety. After the day that the right honourable gentleman made his first exposition of his schemes, a gentleman well known to the House, and learned in all the political secrets behind the scenes, met me and said, ‘Well, what do you think of your chief’s plan?’ Not knowing exactly what to say, but taking up a phrase which has been much used in the House, I observed, ‘Well, I suppose it is a great and comprehensive plan.’ ‘Oh!’ he replied, ‘we know all about it; it was offered to us. It is not his plan; it’s Popkins’s plan.’ And is England to be governed by Popkins’s plan? Will he go to the country with it? Will he go with it to that ancient and famous England that once was governed by statesmen—by Burleighs and by Walsinghams; by Bolingbrokes and by Walpoles; by a Chatham and a Canning—will he go to it with this fantastic scheming of some presumptuous pedant? I won’t believe it: I have that confidence in the common sense, I will say the common spirit, of our countrymen, and I believe they will not long endure this huckstering tyranny of the Treasury Bench—those political pedlars that bought their party in the cheapest market and sold us in the dearest.

I know, Sir, that there are many who believe that the time is gone by when one can appeal to those high and honest impulses that were once the mainstay and the main element of the English character. I know, Sir, that we appeal to a people debauched by public gambling—stimulated and encouraged by an inefficient and shortsighted minister. I know that the public mind is polluted with economic fancies: a depraved desire that the rich may become richer without the interference of industry and toil. I know, Sir, that all confidence in public men is lost. But, Sir, I have faith in the primitive and

enduring elements of the English character. It may be vain now, in the midnight of their intoxication, to tell them that there will be an awakening of bitterness; it may be idle now, in the springtide of their economic frenzy, to warn them that there may be an ebb of trouble. But the dark and inevitable hour will arrive. Then, when their spirit is softened by misfortune, they will recur to those principles that made England great, and which, in our belief, can alone keep England great. Then, too, perchance they may remember, not with unkindness, those who, betrayed and deserted, were neither ashamed nor afraid to struggle for the 'good old cause'—the cause with which are associated principles the most popular, sentiments the most entirely national, the cause of labour, the cause of the people—the cause of England.

## AYLESBURY, June 26, 1847.

[At the General Election of 1847 Mr Disraeli was returned for Buckinghamshire, and in the course of his canvass made several long speeches to the county electors. They all of course turn on the policy of the Government. At two o'clock in the morning of June 26th, 1846. Sir Robert Peel had been defeated on the Irish Coercion Bill; and Lord John Russell had succeeded to his place. The dissolution of 1847, like the dissolution of 1852, was an appeal to the country on the principles of Free Trade, which in each case were decisively endorsed. The following speech, delivered at Aylesbury on June 26th, contains many characteristic passages, especially the comparison between Liberal opinions and popular principles.]

MY honourable friend, the member for the county, has been pleased to allude to me in terms which only his courtesy can justify, but for which I am very sensible that I am indebted to that kindness and good feeling which has ever characterised his behaviour to me, both in public and in private. I think I may, without presuming to bandy compliments with my honourable friend, remind you that during the years we have both been members of the Parliament of this country—I think I may say that on every public occasion of interest or importance, there has never existed between my honourable friend and myself the slightest difference of opinion: we have divided under the same banner; we have counted in the same lobby; we have struggled, sometimes in triumph, and sometimes in defeat, in the same cause; and this also have I to say for my honourable friend and myself, that in our triumphs we have triumphed over our enemies, and that when we have been defeated we have been discomfited by our friends. I appear before you to-day under different circum-

stances from those which I have hitherto had the honour on more than one occasion to address the members of the Protection Society of Bucks. I appear to you this day to decide on my claims to the representation of your county, as it were to a grand jury of the county of Bucks, and I ask you to decide upon my claims on the opinion you have formed of my principles as interpreted by my past career. I owe the fact of my appearing here this day to the invitation of the electors, under circumstances of almost unparalleled political interest. The people of England, who, whether right or wrong, had formed opinions which they had solemnly sanctioned at the late general election, found themselves last year suddenly deserted by those whom they had elected as their chiefs. Still confident in the opinions they had at all times advocated, the people of England saw that body of men, an army without discipline, almost without officers, suddenly form themselves into a band, present a front to the enemy, choose with spontaneous feeling men for their leaders, and enter into a campaign which, though unsuccessful, was not inglorious. Honourable men who sympathise with our cause came from the country to our assistance, and marking me in the crowd, of which I was one of the humblest but not the least energetic, they invited me to become a candidate for the suffrages of the county of Bucks.

These persons were not found among the ancient aristocracy or the territorial proprietary of the county—though many of those, I am proud to say, will now exercise their just and legitimate influence to my support—but they were found among the yeomanry and farmers of the county of Bucks. It was they who formed the deputation that, in the crisis of 1846, came up to London; they joined with us in the campaign; they assisted us with their counsel; they witnessed our exertions, and they at last told me that they thought the industry of the county of Buckingham would find in me a representative who would certainly be faithful, and who might not be incapable. But, far from listening to these suggestions, I shrank from such a step until I was led to believe that it would be received with no disfavour from the great body of the proprietors of the county.

It is not necessary for me to assure you, gentlemen, that I do not appeal to your confidence on the extent of my acres or the antiquity of my family. Even if my acres were as extensive as those of Stowe, of which I am said to be the nominee, I hope I have that proper pride in me that would prevent my appealing to any portion of my fellow-subjects on the score of property; and I have yet to learn that now in the nineteenth century a man is to be allowed to occupy any position which he wishes to fill on any other general ground than this, that he by his actions has been proved to have both capability and capacity. I am not for a moment disposed to admit that my pedigree is not as good as and even superior to that of the Cavendishes; but as my opponent and his representative have chosen to narrow the question to that issue, I accept the ground on which he is prepared to fight. Let him pride himself on his blood; I have confidence in my brains—and I am not alarmed as to the result. This I can tell the silent candidate and his two loquacious champions, that if he appeals to ancestry, I have a father, more than eighty years of age, who is a freeholder of the county of Buckingham, and who intends to record his vote for his son when the day of election arrives. I would not change that father, who for half a century has laboured to form the tastes and instruct the minds of his fellow-countrymen, for any Duke alive or dead, even if that Duke were a Duke of Devonshire.

There is another point which is deeply interesting to you, and which I wish to touch upon without passion—I mean the relation between this country and the Papal See; and to this question I shall address myself briefly, but I hope clearly and explicitly. I have now been in Parliament ten years, and during that time I can truly say I have not given a vote which did not tend to secure to the Roman Catholics social, political, and civil equality. Nay, when such a question was put, I thought it my duty to view it in a large and generous light. I never thought, I never nursed the idea, after what had passed in 1829, that we were living under a Protestant constitution. This may be a very splendid phrase: it may serve for our solace in our political and convivial meetings; but I early felt that it was necessary to discriminate between phrases and facts. But though we do

not live under a Protestant constitution, I thank God that we do live in a Protestant country. You allowed the Roman Catholics to enter Parliament, and the moment you did that it is a mockery to pretend that you live under a Protestant constitution. The Roman Catholic member makes the minister; the minister makes the bishop; and the only security to the Protestantism of this country is that it is a Protestant country. These are my opinions. I know that they are founded on truth. If the people of this country have confidence in their own feelings, they are safe; but if apathy should influence them on this point, then there is no security for that Protestantism in which they are so deeply interested. After the great change of 1829, then, I thought it my duty to award to the Roman Catholics social, civil, and political equality. You must admit this conclusion—you cannot resist it if you would—it is only on the *introduction* of new principles that you can make any stand. The grant to Maynooth appeared to me to be a question of this nature. It was brought forward by a most adroit man in a most insidious speech. He told us that in this grant no question of principle was involved, because the principle was conceded—that it was simply the difference between the expenditure of 20,000*l.* and the expenditure of 30,000*l.*—that, in fact, it was only a question of detail. And therefore the party which was not only the most powerful that this country has ever witnessed, but which I must say, though I myself was a member of it, was the most unscrupulous—that party did not hesitate to concede the vote.

What was my conduct? Though I had every opportunity to give a vote favourable to the Government; though my constituency did not altogether agree with me in my opinion; though my own personal friends, men to whom I was bound by every tie, not of political feeling alone, but of personal affection—half a dozen men who rallied round my banner to oppose the most powerful minister of the country—though these men thought that this was a question of mere detail; though my wishes were and had been, after 1829, that the concession to the Roman Catholics, social, political, and civil, should be without limit; though I thought, and am bound to repeat, that you

have destroyed the Protestant constitution of this country, yet I did believe and do believe that England is a Protestant country, and I was forced to the consideration, both by the speeches of the minister and by his opponents, who succeeded him in power, and who said that the real question was the endowment of the Roman Catholic Church—I was forced to the consideration that my duty at the moment was to oppose the minister and place myself in painful collision with my constituents—though they have since voted a resolution of unlimited confidence in me—to place myself in collision with my personal friends, and ultimately to break up<sup>1</sup> that small but most influential body of men who were the first who shook Sir R. Peel from his high pedestal: and at all these sacrifices I opposed the measure and denounced the principle which was really though secretly contained in it. I rested my speech upon a broad basis: I rested it upon the principle of opposing the State endowment of any creed. A reverend gentleman, indeed, has supposed, in consequence of this, that I was opposed to the union of Church and State. But I never can admit that the Church of England was endowed by the State of England. The ecclesiastical estate is the patrimony of the Church. I am not one of those who approve of any change in the present connection between Church and State; but the Church existed and flourished before that connection, and though I cannot speculate on such a catastrophe as to suppose the Church would cease to exist after its dissolution, I cannot even admit that the Church would then cease to flourish. I cannot conceive an idea more fallacious than to suppose that the safety of the Church depends on the protection of the State. When did the people ever plunder the Church? The Church has been plundered by monarchs who were galled by her restraints; by a rapacious aristocracy who were ravenous for her estates; by gentlemen of Liberal opinions who found her authority inconvenient; but never by the people, of whom the Church is the natural protector.

The Church is founded upon popular principles, not upon Liberal opinions. Since I made this distinction at Newport, a

<sup>1</sup> It appears from this that Mr. Disraeli's speech and vote on the Maynooth Bill broke up the Young England party in the House of Commons.



month ago, it has been described as sheer nonsense by all the Liberal journals of the country. Gentlemen, real nonsense does not require the abuse of a whole month—silence is rather its appropriate doom. Depend upon it when a man and a phrase are much abused, there is something in both. Liberal opinions are the opinions of those who would be free from certain constraints and regulations, from a certain dependence and duty which are deemed necessary for the general or popular welfare. Liberal opinions are very convenient opinions for the rich and powerful. They ensure enjoyment and are opposed to self-sacrifice. The holder of Liberal opinions, for example, maintains that the possession of land is to be considered in a commercial light and no other. He looks to the income which it will afford him. It is not a Liberal opinion that the holder of land should incur the duty of executing justice and maintaining truth among the multitude for nothing. That, gentleman, is a popular principle, a principle of government for the benefit of the people, not a Liberal opinion. A poor law is also founded upon a popular principle; Liberal opinions are entirely adverse to its enactments. Gentlemen, I might pursue, and will take every opportunity of pursuing, these illustrations. It might be drawn from every province of our social system. As it is not the interest of the rich and the powerful to pursue popular principles of government, the wisdom of great men and the experience of ages have taken care that these principles should be cherished and perpetuated in the form of institutions. Thus, the majesty that guards the multitude is embodied in a throne; the faith that consoles them hovers round the altar of a national Church; the spirit of discussion which is the root of public liberty flourishes in the atmosphere of a free Parliament. But, instead of royalty, a gentleman of Liberal opinions would prefer that the supreme executive should be entrusted to a person of his own class, with the title of a President, and perhaps to have the chance of becoming President himself; instead of a national Church he prefers to choose and pay for his own minister of religion, if he has a wish for one; and although he is not adverse to the theory of representative government, provided the representation is absorbed by his own order, he encourages the real transaction

of affairs to be conducted by paid commissioners and select committees.

Against these opinions I have ever struggled ; I believe that under them all national greatness must wither. To rescue this country from their degrading yoke I wish to enter Parliament as your representative : not that I should gain the votes of those merely who are present in this room ; not that I wish to gain the influence of your friends ; not that I wish to become member for the county through the force of personal gratitude, or as if it were some personal object I had to accomplish. I want you to understand that in the present contest more than this is at stake, and that your exertion of the suffrage in my favour will give a higher moral weight to my advocacy of these opinions. I come before you, gentlemen, with none of those aristocratic recommendations by which the candidate of the neighbouring tavern aspires to represent the county. Though no one can be more sensible of their legitimate social influence than myself, no one has done more by his speeches or his pen to uphold those loftier influences which regulate society. I appeal to this great, it may be this aristocratic, constituency. I say, Return me to Parliament, not because I am a relative to the Duke of Devonshire—not because my broad lands stretch from Buckingham to Aylesbury—but because my public character and my Parliamentary reputation have shown you that I may be trusted, and, what is more, that I am capable. I put this without the gloss or the gaudy veil with which a practised speaker might put it before you. I have placed the question before you in its naked truth. It is better that it should be so—better that you should plainly understand why it is that I ask your confidence. I do not pretend to be a man of great family or fortune ; but I have proved to you that I am capable of advocating your interests. The time is come in which you should understand that—and that is the question on which I go before the country. I might say there is another—there is a subject which is personal to myself ; but which, because it is personal to myself, I shall not do more than refer to. But I think it also deeply concerns the honour of the county of Buckingham. You are the first great constituency which has been

appealed to by any man of mark or likelihood that has taken an eminent part in the recent industrial struggle. It is certainly not here—not in this presence—that I will utter one word of acerbity or criticism upon that great minister from whom, in your conflict, I have not shrunk. In the House of Commons, and in the House of Commons alone, am I prepared to meet Sir Robert Peel: not in this hall, not on the hustings, shall any word of criticism or captious comment fall from my lips as to the conduct of that eminent individual. I have met him in that field which the public opinion of this country has long recognised as the only one where a true knight can win his golden spurs, and I will not desecrate the recollection of the combat by allowing it to degenerate into a squabble. But I tell you that at a time when there was in this country the most powerful party combination which England ever witnessed, with the ablest and most adroit men at the head of that confederation—I came forward certainly at a time when I little thought of becoming member for Buckinghamshire, and I expressed in the senate of the country those opinions which I have advocated in this hall. I was supported in that struggle by many of the gentlemen of England—by none more zealously than your honourable member. In that contest what had I not to endure? The sneers and slanders of hirelings, repeated everywhere but in my presence. What had I not to encounter? But I did not complain; I was confident in English justice—confident in the sympathies of my fellow-countrymen which I believed such a course would insure. Well then, will you by your votes prove that I was wrong? If you prove that I was wrong, what must be said of our public spirit; what of the spirit of the county of Buckingham—a county which boasts of that eminent person who quitted the cabinet in vindication of your principles? What will your answer be when it is said that I came here a year after the crisis, demanding your suffrages on account of my Parliamentary conduct, and that you refused me? I cannot believe that such will be the result. Support me, and you will raise the tone of public spirit. Acknowledge that I have a thousand deficiencies—that I am not the son of a duke—that I am not a man of vast estate—that I have nothing but my

ability, the position which I have achieved, or the confidence and sympathy of my fellow-countrymen. But if you return me as your representative, you will read a lesson which will not soon be forgotten. You will give a tone of public feeling—nay, you will elevate the tone of public feeling, for you will tell England, ‘Let a man be prepared to act with capacity, fidelity, and conscientiousness, and he will find support from the people of England ; and we, the electors of Buckinghamshire, have proved that the highest reward of public men in this land is the approbation of their fellow-countrymen.’

INCOME TAX, March 10, 1848.<sup>1</sup>

[In this speech Mr. Disraeli denies that Sir Robert Peel in 1845 was carrying out the commercial principles he had inaugurated in 1842. The principles of 1842 were, he said, pure Tory principles—the principles of Mr. Pitt and the principles of Lord Shelburne and Lord Bolingbroke. The policy proclaimed by the minister on his first accession to office contemplated a large system of commercial treaties; and was in fact a policy of reciprocity. True Free Trade did not mean open ports on the one side against hostile tariffs on the other. In this debate Mr. Gladstone spoke strongly in favour of reciprocity as an abstract principle, lamenting only that other countries would not respond to our overtures. In other words, the original scheme of commercial treaties having fallen through, Sir Robert Peel had found it necessary to go on to Free Trade without them.<sup>2</sup>

After questioning some of the figures of the speaker who had preceded him, Mr. Disraeli addressed himself to the main point of his speech.]

SIR, the honourable member has also observed that the late minister, in 1845, confirmed and called upon the House to confirm the commercial principles which, under his advice, they adopted in 1842. Now, Sir, here again I entirely differ with the honourable gentleman. I deny that the commercial principles which were propounded and carried into law by the ministers in 1845 were the commercial principles which they introduced into our notice in 1842. Sir, when the minister came forward with his measures in 1842, he found himself in this situation. I advert very briefly to circumstances with which we are all now so familiar. He had to supply a considerable deficit in the revenue, and he wished to revive commerce by a reformation of our tariff. His instrument for this purpose

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

<sup>2</sup> Hansard, vol. xcvi. 3rd series, p. 440.

was an income-tax. Now, Sir, it is not for me to say what were the motives of the right honourable gentleman when he first introduced the income-tax to our notice, after what he stated the other night. The right honourable gentleman's own version is surely the one we ought to accept, and I trust, therefore, that no controversy on that point will arise again. The right honourable gentleman has given in his adhesion to the principle of indirect taxation, and I am obliged to him for it; as to entering into the question of German translations of his letters to foreigners, it really is of very slight importance. The fact remains, and, unless we succeed in our amendment to-night, I fear, will remain, that we have an income-tax. But however obscure may have been the expressions with which the income-tax was first proposed, no one can deny that the minister was quite frank and explicit as to the principles on which his commercial changes were proposed in 1842. To terminate prohibitions, to reduce protective duties in practical amount, to raise a revenue by moderate duties on raw materials, and to admit the manufactures of other countries at duties varying from 12 to 20 per cent.—these were the principles laid down by the right honourable gentleman in 1842; and I am not surprised that, generally speaking, the House sanctioned those principles, and adopted them by an almost unanimous concurrence. (Sir R. Peel: My plan was to levy 5 per cent. on raw materials.) Exactly so—to levy a revenue by moderate duties on raw materials. But allow me to remind the Committee of a very important portion of the scheme of the right honourable gentleman which was also promised us. This abrogation of prohibitions—this reduction of protective duties—this scheme of raising a revenue at very moderate rates on raw materials, and permitting foreign manufactures to enter on reasonable terms, was accompanied by an announcement to the House that the minister was already in communication with several foreign nations for treaties of commerce. This was a prime and important element in these measures and our discussions. Sir, in all this the right honourable gentleman acted as great ministers had acted before him. He acted exactly as Mr. Pitt did in 1787. He followed entirely the example of Mr. Pitt,

who pursued the principles of other great men who had preceded him—Lord Shelburne and Lord Bolingbroke. And thus the right honourable gentleman, when he proposed his commercial changes in 1842, announced at the same time that he was bringing all the influence of his justly powerful name, and of his singularly powerful Government, on foreign Courts, in order to obtain a reciprocal commercial intercourse between this and other countries. Sir, I gave to the right honourable gentleman on that occasion a humble, but a sincere and hearty support. I never shall regret it. And I only allude on this occasion to a circumstance of such very slight importance because, in a pamphlet entitled ‘Pitt and Peel,’<sup>1</sup> the author—who, for aught I know, may be sitting at this moment in the House—has done me the too great honour of referring to my conduct on that occasion; and therefore I tell him that I gave that support to the measures of the right honourable gentleman because they were founded on the principles which I have stated and held out the promises to which I have referred.

But now we come to 1845, a period of time singularly glided over by the honourable gentleman the member for Westbury,<sup>2</sup> who seems not so much the advocate of free trade as the late administration of free trade. On the subject of our present debate, I address a few observations to the Government. I have a great respect for the present Government for many reasons; but with respect to principles on economical subjects they have none, or if they have any they are embalmed in a very valuable budget which the right honourable gentleman near me prevented passing in 1841. The present principles of the Government on these subjects are mimetic—mimetic of the late Government; and again, the principles on these subjects of the late Government are not original, for they are converts. Therefore, when I discuss the principles of the new commercial system, I address myself to the gentlemen opposite below the gangway. They were proudly responsible for those principles when it was supposed they would increase the prosperity of the country; and they ought not now to avoid the moral, although they may the

<sup>1</sup> The pamphlet was attributed to Mr. (now Viscount) Cardwell.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. James Wilson.

official, responsibility of having advocated those principles. I must therefore remind the honourable member for Westbury—who was not in the last House of Commons, but who is so great an accession to the present—of what took place in 1845. During that period a great commercial confederation had arisen, very completely organised and conducted by very able men. They made great way in the country, and they promulgated opinions on commerce very different from those propounded by the late minister in 1842. They were not the opinions of Mr. Pitt, of Lord Shelburne, or of Lord Bolingbroke. They were not the opinions of free trade which I am prepared to support. Yes, I am a free-trader but not a free-booter—honourable gentlemen opposite are free-booters. The great leaders of the school of Manchester never pretended for a moment that they advocated the principles of regulated competition or reciprocal intercourse; on the contrary, they brought forward new principles, expressed in peculiar language. They laid down this principle, that you were to buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market. I deny that that is the principle of commerce. Commerce is barter. The principle of buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest market is the principle of retail trade, and of a huckstering retail trade. Another principle laid down by these gentlemen was, that you were to take care of your imports and let your exports take care of themselves. These new principles were totally opposed to the principles of free trade. These were the principles, however, for which the country was agitated; and in 1845 the late minister gave his adhesion to them. And here I must observe that during the whole period that elapsed between 1842 and 1845, the late minister never produced one of those commercial treaties which he promised us in 1842. (Mr. Gladstone: Because foreign Powers would not agree to them.) I want no more important admission than that which I have just received from a late Secretary of State. The attempt to induce foreign Powers to enter into commercial treaties failed; and therefore the late minister adopted a principle which denied the expediency of obtaining such treaties. That was the state of affairs in 1845. Now, I maintain that the principles then acted upon were not the principles of Mr.



Pitt. However, by virtue of the new dogmas which had been propagated by a powerful confederation out of doors, and which were directly opposed to the principles which Her Majesty's Government had theretofore professed, the House was again induced to renew the impost of the income-tax, and at the same time to cut off a revenue of more than four millions and a half of money.

I have not stated precisely the difference between the ministerial principles of 1842 and 1845. After having, as I believe, injured the revenue, or at least, as all admit, diminished the revenue to the amount of 6,500,000*l.*, the late minister came forward in the next year, 1846, and still acting, I suppose it will be said, in conformity with the principles of 1842, repealed the Corn Laws, and then again diminished the revenue by the repeal of other customs' duties to the further amount of 1,200,000*l.*, making a total diminution during his administration of more than 7,500,000*l.*; and then he retired from office. And here it is due to the right honourable baronet to refer to an apparently triumphant statement which he addressed to the nation though his constituents only a few months back, on the success of his commercial measures, which he sought to establish by a reference to the state of the revenue previous and subsequent to his great changes. Perhaps I may be able to make the Committee hesitate before they accord to this statement the epithet of triumphant. I believe in that vindication is involved a great fallacy. I admit that at the first glance, especially in the heat of a contested election, nothing would be calculated to tell better than a statement from the late head of an administration that he had reduced imports to the amount of 7,600,000*l.*, and that, notwithstanding, the revenue (allowing for the effect of the reduction of the sugar duties by the Whig Government) had suffered only to the extent of about 700,000*l.*, compared with the revenue of 1841, the period when he assumed office. That statement produced a great effect at the time, somewhat diminished since both our revenue has decreased and our exports have fallen off. Sir, I believe that a great fallacy pervades the line of argument adopted by the right honourable gentleman in his address of last July. I deny

that the state of the revenue is a correct test of commercial legislation. The truest and indeed the only test of commercial legislation is commercial prosperity. A minister may think fit to cut off several millions from the revenue of the country, principally raised by duties on foreign articles, and yet the revenue may be supported by some peculiar internal and exceptional cause. The state of the revenue all that time would be no test of the state of the commerce of the country; and this will happen, that when the peculiar internal and exceptional cause ceases to operate, the minister will suddenly find himself with exports on the one hand diminished, and revenue on the other hand rapidly falling away; and that I believe to be the real state of things in England at the present moment. Sir, I believe our foreign trade is declining, because our commercial system is founded on a principle injurious to our native labour, and opposed to the increase of the national capital. I remember once asking the late minister whether he were prepared to fight hostile tariffs with free imports, and I never could get from him a very definite reply on this head. Yet in the solution of that problem, I cannot but believe, the cause of our present commercial difficulties may mainly be discovered.

Sir, I apprehend that the result of a trade carried on between a country which permits free imports and one which maintains hostile tariffs, is, that the exports of the former are diminished in proportion to the amount of those tariffs, without diminishing, in the unprotected country, the demand for the productions of the people by which the duties are imposed. What is the consequence? The country of free imports is obliged to give more labour for the production of the country which guards against interference with its labour by hostile tariffs. Thus England, by playing the game of free imports against hostile tariffs, entails upon the subjects of Her Majesty the necessity of labouring more to obtain the same foreign products; or, if labouring the same, receiving a less quantity of them in exchange. Our labour becomes less effective. What is this but the degradation of labour? But our new commercial system not only renders the labour of this country less valuable; it operates in another sense fatally on our fortunes, as we are ex-

periencing at this moment. As it renders the cost of all foreign products, measured by our labour, more dear, it enhances the price of the precious metals, which are also foreign products. The same rule applies to gold and silver as to other foreign articles. Under the present system of free imports the country is obliged to labour more to obtain the same quantity of the precious metals than it had to do before. The honourable gentleman the member for Manchester taunted me the other night with having said that if the Corn Laws were repealed, all the gold would go out of the country; and yet, he added, the gold had come back again. Such observations may do very well for Covent Garden, but will scarcely suit the House of Commons. The gold has certainly come back; we know how it came back, and at what cost. It will go out again, and it will come back again, and by a process still more costly. On every occasion you will have to pay more for the precious metals; and the consequence will be that, gradually as your command over the precious metals diminishes, the range of your prices will proportionately lower, and the distribution of the precious metals throughout the world will be altered. I doubt whether, under such circumstances, you will be able to maintain those establishments the expenditure of which is now so much criticised. I doubt still more whether under such circumstances you will be able to pay the interest on your public debt; I may even venture to suggest to you whether in such a change you will be able to maintain your standard of value. At all events, two results must, in my mind, inevitably occur—the degradation of the national labour and a new distribution of the precious metals opposed to all our previous economical relations.

The member for Westbury seemed to regret that foreign countries had not manifested a reciprocal sympathy with us in our commercial changes. But if the honourable gentleman believes in his principles—if he really believes that we are to take care of the imports and let the exports take care of themselves—why should he regret it? True it is that the right honourable gentleman the late minister, even in the fatal year of 1846, when he advocated the most extravagant

doctrines of the Manchester school, and seemed to delight even in overstating his opinions, in order as it were to mortify us—true it is that even then the right honourable gentleman seemed to have some slight misgivings on this subject of reciprocity, and, notwithstanding his dogmatic independence of the principle, was accustomed to hold out some cheering hopes of its occurrence. Did we not hear that Prussia was shaken? Did he not read to the House an address of Mr. Walker, the Secretary of the Treasury in the United States, promising a new Treasury Bill to Congress, founded on greatly reduced custom-house duties? Well, what has been the result? Has Prussia been ‘shaken’? My answer is, look to the recent legislation of the Zollverein. Where is Mr. Walker’s new Treasury Bill? What is it? I can recall a passage in the Message of the President in December 1846 describing that measure. The President said the measure had been misconceived; and he assured Congress that by its arrangements foreign commodities imported into America in no case paid a duty less than one-third of the cost of the production of those commodities. That was in December 1846. What has happened since? Look to the Message of last year. Read the comments on the President’s congratulations on the prosperity of the manufacturing interest in the Government journal which I have in my hand. The President congratulates the manufacturing interest on their fears being dispelled; and the journal shows them that the protection they have always enjoyed, though changed in form, is only rendered more effective—that it is only a redistribution of protection—and that there is an average *ad valorem* duty of 28 per cent. So much for Prussia and the United States, from whom we were promised so much. Well, then, how is it with France? Have our hopes there been better realised. I remember on this subject the right honourable baronet making a very remarkable observation about France. He said it was not the people of France who were opposed to a more liberal commercial intercourse with us, but the manufacturing and commercial aristocracy of that country. Well, the French have got rid of their commercial and manufacturing aristocracy. The people are lords paramount in Paris; but I must be per-

mitted to doubt whether their recent acts are indicative of that strong desire for reciprocal commercial intercourse for which the right honourable gentleman gave them credit. We have not been favoured lately with any remarkable evidence of the friendly feelings of the French people for English industry.

I remember a noble friend of mine, unhappily no longer a member of this House, Lord John Manners, warning the late minister on that occasion that he might be deceived, and quoting the opinion on the subject of a writer who, my noble friend rightly said, expressed the real feelings of the working classes of France. The writer was M. Louis Blanc. M. Louis Blanc is now a leading member of the Provisional Government of France; but if I am to judge from his speeches and his writings, he is not exactly the man who will come forward and propose such a commercial treaty with England as France was prepared to enter into with Mr. Pitt, in 1787. I make these observations in answer to the speech in favour of the late Government delivered by the honourable member for Westbury. I must, notwithstanding his address, express my opinion that the present commercial distress, and the financial disorder that is so rapidly arising, are to be ascribed to the new commercial system; that, if that system be persisted in, our commercial distress and financial embarrassment will increase; and that if our financial embarrassment has not sooner arrived, it has been prevented by exceptional circumstances which have nothing to do with the new commercial system, but which, on the contrary, are of a character totally opposite to it. That is my position, and I am prepared to prove my case if the House will permit me. One advantage of discussing it fully now will be to prevent its recurring, and you will be able to pass your measures by those triumphant majorities that in a short time will ruin the country. I will not blink the question in the least. I will not bring forward a solitary item out of a tariff of 1,200 or 1,300 articles, and tell you that such an article was selling at so much before you abolished or lowered the duty upon it, and that you promised it would be so much cheaper, though that promise has never been fulfilled. I will meet the question completely—I will take as the territory on which I wish to

investigate the consequences of your new system, the very scene of that noble industry that produces the chief staple manufacture of the country. I will go to the province that is the fatal author of these pernicious principles, and I will show you the state of its population. I will show you the causes that have produced that state, and the hopeless condition which awaits them if you do not entirely change all the principles of your legislation.

We will enter the county of Lancaster. It is scarcely necessary to enter into the general question of our exports. That there has been a considerable falling-off no one denies. I believe that they have been completely made up and published within these few hours by the Board of Trade, and that the falling-off is somewhere about 2,500,000*l.* But, not to press upon that point, you recollect perfectly well that when the right honourable gentleman the member for Tamworth made his protection speeches and carried everything before him, and referred to the state of our exports, the gentlemen opposite used to say, ‘You know nothing about it; the flourishing state of our exports to which you appeal is a proof of our poor condition—it is a proof of our manufacturing and commercial distress.’ If, therefore, I were not to press this point upon them, they might say that the state of our exports at present is the very best proof of their prosperity. There is, as I have said, a decline to the amount of 2,500,000*l.*; and I am sorry to say that that great amount must be taken from the general exports of Lancashire. Here is a picture of the state of the principal districts, drawn by free-traders, for I quote from free-traders only. One of the most consistent free-traders states that within the last month—I quote from the *Morning Chronicle*—unprecedented distress has become general; and it speaks of meetings of operatives being held in all parts of Lancashire, Derbyshire, and parts of Yorkshire. Among these meetings there is one of a somewhat novel character; for, instead of discussing the rate of wages, the meeting confined itself to a consideration of the means of emigrating the surplus hands among them to the United States. The project was adopted unanimously, and it was fixed to commence in a fort-

night from that day. I am assuredly not surprised that it was adopted unanimously, as I have been favoured with a document that throws some light on the state of Manchester at the close of the years ending December 1846 and 1847. The amount paid to the poor in the year ending December 1846, at Manchester, to 48,000 persons, was 19,243*l.*; in the year ending December, 1847, there was paid to 149,504 persons the sum of 45,000*l.*; showing you the state of the operatives in that district. This shows the state of the trade and of the operatives.

I will now enter upon the question of the cause of this condition. We have heard that the exports from Manchester have fallen off, and I am ready to show that there has been a decrease in almost all the foreign markets to which the goods of Manchester go. To Hamburg—which port supplies Prussia and Hanover—there is a great decrease of all kinds of cotton goods (except cords and jeans) as well as of yarn. To Holland there is also a great decrease, and that without the exception of a single article. To Belgium there is a decrease of cotton yarn, thread, and cotton sundries, but an increase of plain and printed calicos, cambrics, and muslins. To Denmark there is a slight decrease of goods and yarn, but a slight increase of thread. Sweden and Norway give exactly the same results as Denmark. To Prussia there is a decrease of cotton yarn, cotton sundries, printed cottons, cambrics and muslins, cords and jeans, but an increase of cotton thread and plain calicoes. To France there is a decrease of every description of cotton goods, as well as of yarn and thread. To Naples there is a decrease in yarn and plain calicoes, but an increase in cotton thread and printed goods. To Sardinia, Tuscany, and Trieste, there is a decrease of every article except cotton thread. To Egypt there is a decrease of yarn and plain calicoes, but an increase of thread and printed calicoes. To Gibraltar and Spain there is a decrease in every article. To Portugal and Madeira there is also a decrease of all. To Chili and Peru there is a general increase. To Mexico there is a very great decrease. To Columbia also. To the Brazils there is an increase of cotton yarn and thread, of printed calicoes, and of cambrics, but a decrease of plain calicoes. To the British West Indies there is a decrease in all

articles. To the foreign West Indies, and the neutral port of St. Thomas, there is generally a decrease. To British North America there is a small decrease in most articles. To India there is a decrease in the exports of everything except cotton thread. The decrease in the exports of plain calicoes is upwards of 64,000,000 yards, and that of printed calicoes upwards of 4,000,000. The decrease in the export of yarns is nearly 6,000,000 lbs. To China, Manilla, and Singapore there is a decrease in everything except cotton yarn. To Mauritius and Batavia there is an increase in yarn and plain cottons, and a decrease in every other kind. To the coast of Africa and the Cape, there is a great increase both in plain and coloured cottons, and also in yarn. To Australia there is an increase of cotton sundries and plain calicoes, but a decrease of other goods. To New Zealand and the South Sea Islands there is a decrease of all kinds of goods, and also of yarn. Now, as to the United States: there is an extraordinary increase in the exports of all articles to the United States. Though the exports generally from this country show a deficiency of 2,500,000*l.* this year, I admit that there is an increase in the exports of British manufactures to the United States to the amount of 2,000,000*l.*; but I am informed by one able to give correct information, that so far as the industry of Lancashire is concerned—and it is a rule that, I fear, will apply to every kind of British produce exported to America—the manufacturers of those goods have not received more than 67 per cent. of their outlay. Now, what is the cause of this? I find that cause in what is called our free-trade legislation; and as an instance is worth a hundred arguments, I will take one of the most celebrated, and, apparently, most successful measures of the new system, and trace in detail its working in the county of Lancaster, and its influence on profits and wages. I will take the last and most important alteration in our sugar duties—a measure from which very considerable benefit was anticipated, both to commerce and the working classes.

Now, I want to show the immediate effects of the change on the industry of which Manchester is the centre. For this purpose I will take two periods of eighteen months—the first



period being from February 1845 to August 1846; and the next from August 1846 to February 1848. During the first of these periods, and before the change of the sugar duties, there were exported to the British West Indies, Mauritius, Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta, goods to the value of 5,800,000*l.*, and there was left for profits and wages 4,000,000*l.* In the second period there were exported goods to the value of 4,650,000*l.*, and there was left for profits and wages 2,600,000*l.* To Cuba, Porto Rico, and Brazil in the first period the value of the goods exported was 2,400,000*l.*, and there was left for wages and profits 1,700,000*l.* In the second period the value of the goods was 2,800,000*l.*, leaving for wages and profits 1,800,000*l.* If the whole amount of wages and profits during the second period be deducted from the amount during the first—that is, if we deduct 4,400,000*l.* from 5,600,000*l.*, it will be found that, with the advantage of the change in the sugar duties, allowing a consumption of 23½*lb.* of sugar per head, the factory population, 700,000 in number, while they have gained 68,542*l.* on the one hand, have lost in wages, on the other, no less than 1,161,695*l.* To that amount have you robbed the people of Manchester by giving them cheap sugar. Now, here is another equally significant statement on the same subject, for which I am indebted to a very intelligent man, Mr. Burn, the author of that valuable statistical work ‘The Commercial Glance,’ of which I will give only the results. It is the statement of the exports of plain and printed calicoes to the sugar-growing countries during the same period to which I have already referred. And it appears that, while to the British West Indies, Mauritius, and the three markets of India, we sent in the second period of eighteen months—namely, the period subsequent to the alteration in the sugar duties—more than 62,000,000 yards less of plain calicoes, and nearly 33,000,000 yards less of printed calicoes, than in the first period of eighteen months—namely, the period preceding the alteration—our increase in exports of plain calicoes to the Brazils, Cuba, and Porto Rico, was only 13,000,000 yards, while the quantity of printed calicoes to these markets was stationary; so there was a total deficiency on

all the exports to the sugar-growing countries on these heads, since the alteration of the duties, of 49,000,000 yards. But I shall be told, 'You are speculating on the industry of a district the prosperity of which depends upon the supply of cotton, and that supply during the last year has been of an unprecedented scantiness.' By no means unprecedented. In the first place, I do not mean to maintain that the quantity of the cotton crop is not an important element in the question. The cotton crop of 1847 exceeds that of 1839 by 440,000 bales. It was superior in amount, I apprehend, to the crops of 1841 and 1842. It scarcely could be the want of the raw material that arrested your manufactures last year, since you yourselves exported of that raw material double the quantity to the continent of Europe that you did in previous years. I admit, however, that the price of the raw material is injuriously high. What has occasioned it? Your free-trade legislation. It is the admission into this country of slave-grown sugar that has given a new impulse and direction to the energy and enterprise of the American planter. He has transferred to the production of sugar a considerable proportion of the capital and labour that were before employed in producing cotton.

Here is the trade circular of Wylie & Egana of New Orleans, dated the end of October 1846, three months after the admission into England of slave-grown sugar. It tells you how that alteration in our tariff has roused the energy and enterprise of the American planters. Ninety-four new sugar-estates had been established, and many plantations were passing from cotton to sugar. Yes, it is the transference of American capital to the production of sugar that reduces the quantity of cotton, and that transference has been occasioned by one of the principal measures of your new commercial system. Now, here is a letter from a noble lord, for a long time a member of this House, and who has a personal experience of our plantations. It is dated within these three days. Speaking of the planters of the United States, he says:—

'They are now withdrawing the slaves from the cultivation of cotton, and throwing their labour upon the sugar estates, owing

to the increase of price on sugar. The consequence, and as reckoned upon, will be the running up the price of cotton from 5 cents to 10 cents or even 15 cents per pound, thus increasing the cost of the raw material to our manufacturers.'

And this leads us to another of the great measures of the commercial system, and one of those which principally led to the continued infliction of the income-tax. When the right honourable gentleman in 1846 fully adopted the deleterious doctrine of the Anti-Corn-Law League, that if we took care of the imports the exports would take care of themselves, he tried his hand on cotton. He took off the light duty on cotton, and at one blow deprived the revenue of 640,000*l*. Let us see how this change benefited the country. The duty was reduced on March 19, 1845. The duty was five-sixteenths of a penny. The price rose in the first three months four-sixteenths of a penny.

[Here follows a table of the prices of cotton-wool in the Liverpool market in each three months of the years 1843, 1844, 1845, 1846, 1847, 1848]

Thus when the duty of five-sixteenths of a penny was taken off, the price from 3*d*. to 5½*d*. mounted to 6*d*.: that is to say, instead of falling five-sixteenths of a penny it immediately rose four-sixteenths of a penny per pound. While you are suffering from the injuries inflicted by your new system, you are attributing them to other causes. You are suffering under a grosser monopoly than any you have destroyed; for a greater monopoly than that of the American planters does not exist. You talk of free trade. Here is a very recent *City* article of the *Times*, an advocate of free trade, which has always supported your views:—

'There are very strong indications,' it is said, 'that planters will use every exertion to withhold their crops from market much longer this season than ever before. The high prices ruling during the delivery of the last two crops have placed planters in an unusually independent position, and it now seems a contest between the consumer and producer as to which can wait the longest; the former heretofore has always prevailed, but if he only knew it, the latter has the power—he could, if he would,

live without his cotton crop longer than the spinner could or would without annihilation lay on his oars.'

Of course he could. You turned up your noses at East India cotton, as you have done at everything colonial or imperial. The American planter commands his price. His price is factitious; he regulates the supply, and transfers his surplus labour to the production of slave-grown sugar. We are always taunted with not proving our case; but I have taken you to your own district, and traced the consequences of two of the great measures of your new commercial system. You say they have not had a fair trial. They have had a fair and a full trial and an ample refutation. By removing the duty on cotton, you lost a great branch of revenue, and produced financial embarrassment. By changing the sugar duties, you have produced commercial distress. Are these not sufficient? What more do you want? Do you want the Manchester workhouse still fuller?—the poor rates still higher? Do you want cheaper sugar still? But though in the instance of the cotton duty we have lost so much revenue by the representations of the school of Manchester acting on a nervous minister, we are told there is compensation for this fallacious and pernicious step in the financial consequences of the measure respecting the sugar duties introduced by the present minister in 1846, and which the late minister somewhat grudgingly supported. The 640,000*l.* per annum which we have lost by permitting free imports of cotton has been gained by allowing free imports of sugar. Yes, but in one of our ruined colonies, in one single colony, we have been obliged to supply rice for the support of the population, and to make advances on their coming crop, which was estimated at not less than 450,000*l.* What, then, becomes of the profit to the revenue? I say nothing of the merchants in this branch of commerce who have failed, in consequence of your legislation, to the amount of 6,000,000*l.* sterling. I cannot presume, at this hour, to enter into any other item of the tariff, although there are several which might be cited as illustrative of the pernicious tendency of our commercial system, and the consequences of which, if not so extensively disastrous as those to which I have referred, have yet proved economically as false and

fallacious. I might take the trade in timber, for instance. At this moment the class of Baltic timber mostly used in this country, which before the late minister altered the tariff was selling in bond at 46s. 6d., is now selling at 59s. 10d., a rise in price which I do not think the most brilliant advocate of the late administration will be able to account for by the stimulus given to trade by the altered customs' duty. I think I have now thrown some light on the causes which have plunged Manchester into distress. I think I have brought facts to bear upon the causes which have produced such false results in that confiding and ill-used district.

I think I have shown that those results have sprung from the operation of two of the greatest measures of the Manchester school. Now, in speaking of these subjects, it must not be for a moment supposed that I mean to visit upon the present administration the responsibility of the peculiar circumstances which surround them. I look upon them in the light of a hero in a Greek tragedy—as the victims of overpowering necessity. That necessity, whether it existed in the shape of protection or free trade, could not be resisted; ministers were obliged to fulfil their destiny. Neither am I anxious to visit upon the right honourable gentleman (Sir Robert Peel) the moral responsibility of measures which have proved so disastrous. The responsible parties, if they must be pointed out, sit yonder [referring to the free-traders]. As it is impossible to say what those parties will not do if they be not checked, I think it is important, after the experience we have had, that we should keep quite awake as to the measures which they may yet propose. At present, however, the question is, what is now to be done? My friends say, 'Yes, it is all very well. We agree with what you say, that free trade is a great mistake, and the country is on the point of ruin. But what is to be done? We have a deficiency of 8,000,000*l.* to fight against.' The exact sum—and this is the moral of the administration of the right honourable baronet—this is the exact sum of which he deprived the revenue. This is the result of the doings of the great financial minister who boasted of lightening the springs of industry. But the springs are broken. The machine no longer operates.

We are told that the disasters which have overtaken us are a consequence of overtrading. Now, nobody can accuse the manufacturers and spinners of Manchester of having overtraded, because they have exported no goods, and have no stocks on hand; they have been the victims of a transatlantic monopoly and your sugar legislation. We are told, however, that overtrading is the cause; but nobody can tell us what it is. I want to know, before coming to the ways and means—I want to know from the right honourable gentleman (Sir Robert Peel) how it is, when proposing these fatal measures, which cut off an amount of revenue equal to the present deficiency, that he always recommended his measures on the ground that they would give an impetus to commerce? Why should he have adopted such a course, if there was already a fatal tendency to overtrading? When he addressed the electors of Tamworth, he congratulated them and himself—they, that they had him for a representative; and himself, that he had been able to lighten the springs of industry and give new wings to commerce. Yet we find him, not more than six months afterwards, asserting that overtrading had been the cause of our commercial misfortunes. I do not believe that those misfortunes are to be attributed to overtrading. But I want to know, if they are, who are responsible for it? Is it the minister who boasted of having lightened the springs and stimulated the activity of industry? Or is it those who are the secret authors of all the mischief who came to the minister and complained that they were ‘cabined, cribbed, confined’ in the exercise of their manufacturing and commercial industry, and who told him that all would be right if he followed their advice and made free trade? The minister believed them. He imbibed their opinions. He gave freedom to commerce, and I want to know where it is? Free she may be, but she is wandering about, and no human being knows where to find her. Well, we have a considerable deficiency, through your new commercial legislation; and I wish to state who I think the persons are who ought to supply the ways and means for that deficiency. I think the obligation of making good what has been lost falls upon the gentlemen who have caused the mis-

chief. Now, the mischief—I will not say the whole, but the greater part of the mischief—has been occasioned by a work which may be styled the greatest work of imagination of the nineteenth century—the evidence taken before the Import Duties Committee.

If the right honourable gentleman (Sir Robert Peel) will come forward magnanimously, and instead of saying that he will never change his opinion—I always thought, by the by, that on economical subjects a man might be justified in changing his opinions—if the right honourable gentleman, I say, were to come forward and admit, for example, that the experience of the last three years had convinced him that he was wrong; if the noble lord would come forward with the same candour; and if the school of Manchester would come forward and say they have been ruined by their own act—why, then I will agree to your income-tax. But if you obstinately adhere to your opinions; if the Government assert that its commercial policy is perfectly right; if the Manchester school will acknowledge no change of opinion, I will take your assertions as your genuine belief; and I maintain that there is no necessity whatever for your income-tax, and that you have ample resources in the alleged consequences of your enlightened legislation. I find these resources in the work I have already referred to—a work certainly of the highest authority, for the right honourable gentleman the member for Tamworth declared that it was the basis of his financial legislation. I should first notice the gentleman to whom I have already made an allusion, as it would seem he challenges me to do so—I mean the honourable gentleman the member for Glasgow (Mr. M'Gregor). He seems to think that on a previous occasion I have grievously misrepresented his opinions. Now, all that I said was this, that the right honourable gentleman, in his evidence before the Imports Committee, stated, in substance, that if the corn and provision laws were repealed it would be a gain equal to 100,000,000*l.* a year to the country—that is to say, about 2,000,000*l.* a week. (Mr. M'Gregor: I did not say that.) I will tell you what the right honourable gentleman's words were. I find at page 80—(Mr. M'Gregor rose.) I hope the honourable gentleman will

not interrupt me ; I shall hear what he has to say with the greatest patience when he addresses the House. I can assure him he shall not be misrepresented. I shall quote his evidence as reported by the shorthand writer, and corrected by the honourable gentleman himself. I hope that will satisfy him.

Mr. M'Gregor was asked, 'Taking the gross amount of the revenue paid into the Treasury at 50,000,000*l.*, have you been able to form an opinion of what proportion this additional tax upon the food of the country would be ?'

Mr. M'Gregor answered, 'I consider the taxation imposed on the country by our duty on corn and the provision duties and prohibitions as far greater, probably much more than double the amount of the taxation paid to the Treasury.'

I know the honourable gentleman said, the other night, that he included in his estimate tea, tobacco, and other articles, and wished to convey the idea that I had given too limited a meaning to his expressions. I am sorry to say, however, that I cannot allow the honourable gentleman to get off so easily. He was not content with giving his evidence—he was not content with his five days' examination. The honourable gentleman favoured the committee with a tariff of his own, and that tariff was considered so valuable that it was printed in the appendix. Now, so good an opinion had the honourable gentleman of the duties on tea and sugar, that he left them untouched ; and as regarded tobacco, he actually added to the duty 6*d.* per pound. So the honourable gentleman cannot ride off on that horse. I do not wish by any means to misrepresent him, and the reason why I have singled him out is, that he is one of the prime authors of those measures whose effects and consequences we are considering. Ever since I have had the honour of sitting in this House, I have heard the honourable gentleman spoken of as one of the highest authorities on financial and trade questions. I believe that, as an author, the honourable gentleman is the most voluminous in the English language. If you add the works of St. Thomas Aquinas to those of St. Bernard you will scarcely equal him in number. I had always regarded him as the writer who had formed the statistical spirit of the age. I have read his works, but I will not say I have risen from their



perusal 'a wiser and a better,' though perhaps a duller man. But the honourable gentleman has done more than form the minds of members of Parliament; he has actually formed the minds of Prime Ministers. He is confessedly and avowedly the author of the fatal measures of 1845 and 1846. I certainly have not for this statement the words of the honourable gentleman reported by a shorthand writer, and corrected by himself; but I have his declaration, copied from his own newspaper, with the attention of the public called to it in a leading article written by a pen with which it seemed to me I was familiar. I must quote this declaration to the House, because if I have a weakness for anything, it is for modest merit; and I like no man to be deprived of the fame which is his due, even though it be for burning down a temple. It appears that when the honourable gentleman was canvassing the electors of Glasgow, a gentleman of the name of Andrew Gow relieved the tedium of a public meeting of the supporters of the honourable gentleman by asking him if he had not prepared the tariff of Sir Robert Peel? It is stated in the report that the abruptness of the question rather took the meeting by surprise, and that considerable uproar occurred, which was not allayed till the honourable gentleman, against the wishes of the majority of the meeting, expressed his willingness to answer the question, which he did as follows:—

'If Sir Robert Peel had been in office, and if he (Mr. McGregor) had been in the office of the Board of Trade, no consideration would have induced him to answer the question. But as Sir Robert Peel was not in power, and as, before coming to Glasgow, he had resigned his connection with the Board of Trade——' (The report went on to say that this remark elicited tremendous applause, which lasted for several minutes, and prevented the completion of the sentence. Silence was at length restored, and Mr. McGregor proceeded:—) 'I say that, Sir Robert Peel being out of office, and I no longer in the office of the Board of Trade, I have no hesitation in informing the gentleman who put the question, and this meeting, that I had the honour of preparing the whole of the schedules, the report and the resolutions which were submitted to Parliament on the subject

of the tariff, and in this arduous task I was assisted by no man but my private secretary, Mr. Lack.'

I must own, that the reading of this report produced no little impression on me ; and I regretted some things which had been said in connection with those schedules and resolutions, and which originated in the erroneous impression that the professed author was the real author, and not merely the organ of another. It appeared that the right honourable gentleman the member for Tamworth had not only not been the originator of the new tariff, but he had not in its construction filled even as responsible a position as 'my private secretary, Mr. Lack.' Let the honour of the recent charges be attributed to the real author. When the honourable gentleman made the statement which I have just read, he perhaps thought this country was in a state of great prosperity ; but even now, when its great distress is rather more evident, and when, instead of being the great first cause of commercial reform, the honourable gentleman has subsided during the late debate into 'a simple journeyman' in the affair, the real author must not be forgotten ; and, suffering under the mournful deficit, I want a portion of the 100,000,000*l.* which he said would be gained by his contrivances. Then there was another great name always introduced into discussion before the new commercial system was adopted. It was one of universally acknowledged weight, and exercised at the time an irresistible influence—that of the late Mr. Deacon Hume. This eminent gentleman, in his estimates, was more moderate than the member for Glasgow. Mr. Deacon Hume was asked by the Imports Committee, 'Did you ever make a calculation' (they had all made calculations) 'as to the amount which might be saved from wheat and butcher's meat, if the existing landed monopoly was done away with?' He said he had, and that the amount was '36,000,000*l.* per annum, which the people are in fact paying as completely out of their pockets as though that amount was levied by direct taxation.'

Now, this is the evidence upon which those laws were passed which have ruined Lancashire. But it seems that this estimate of Mr. Deacon Hume, though liberal enough, did not quite satisfy the committee. There was a murmur of disappointment

and one of the members—I apprehend, my honourable friend the member for Montrose, always at mischief—whipped Mr. Deacon Hume up a little, and after this stimulus of cross-examination by his own friends, Mr. Deacon Hume was brought to admit that, one way or other, the loss to the people from the monopoly in question was equal to the whole revenue of the country. Now, I quote none but the evidence of persons who were in important official positions, or were members of this House, because this evidence was the basis of legislation, and because they are the persons to whom in this moment of distress we may look for counsel and succour. There is the learned Doctor, for example, the member for Bolton.<sup>1</sup> He favoured the committee with an estimate, too, of our loss from the corn monopoly. A very moderate one, only 11,000,000*l.* per annum; but still even that sum was an object to a ruined people. Then, too, as I returned to the House after dinner I heard a voice in distress, moaning in the wilderness, for it was very thin, announcing that the country was ruined, and that we must ‘nurse our resources.’ It was the member for Stirling. That gentleman, too, in the then humbler position of Mr. J. B. Smith, had favoured the Imports Duties Committee with his valuable information. This is his evidence. Mr. J. B. Smith expressed his belief that the Corn Laws were a greater burden to the people than all the State taxes together. Pretty well! But the honourable member for Glasgow and his 100,000,000*l.* per annum had spoiled the appetite of the committee for anything so moderate. The honourable member for Montrose took this witness in hand too—desired him to reconsider his estimate and state the ground for his opinion. Upon which Mr. J. B. Smith, on reconsideration, admitted that the loss could not be less than 60,000,000*l.* per. annum, and might be 90,000,000*l.* These are the resources, I suppose, which he now calls upon us to ‘nurse.’ Ah! Sir, it is no laughing matter, when we consider that the country has been ruined by the legislation impelled by these opinions. And I am not at all surprised that the noble lord—whom I am glad to see again, and whom, I am sure, we all hope for many years to see amongst us—should,

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Bowring.

when he recollects that he is governing a country whose laws are based upon such evidence, occasionally feel a little indisposed. This evidence gave the first impulse to the Manchester confederation. I need not, I am sure, remind this House of that picture of the brilliant future of England which was drawn by the great leaders of that confederacy. I never undervalued the talents, the energy, or the earnestness—I only wish there had been the same talent, energy and earnestness elsewhere—of the honourable gentlemen the member for the West Riding<sup>1</sup> and the member for Manchester.<sup>2</sup> These gentlemen may be said to be the representatives of two great principles—Peace and Plenty. Yes! Peace and plenty amid a starving people, and with a world in arms! But I must call the attention of the House to these gentlemen, because after all these measures that have been blown up, all their delusions which have evaporated, all the national distress and misery which they have occasioned, I find those honourable gentlemen, not content with what they have already done, threatening us with another confederation and another league.

Now we are told there is to be a league for fiscal reform. I limit its object to what I have heard proclaimed in the House. I will not notice the more detailed programme which met my eye to-day in a respectable Liberal paper. I see by that, that they do not mean to limit their efforts merely to fiscal reform, but to alter the law of primogeniture, to obtain a better representation of the people, and a variety of other measures, in respect to which, if I thought them formally responsible for them, I should have been prepared with the document to refer to. I notice, I will not call it the threat, but the promise of fiscal reform. The object of this confederation is to throw the taxes of this country upon what, according to the slang of the day, is called realised property, and especially the land of England. All I want to do is to take this opportunity of reminding those gentlemen who are so ready to throw the burden of taxation on realised property, and always on the landed interest, that by the most authentic evidence the fact is established that the land is held by 200,000 proprietors, who divide among

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Cobden.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Bright.

them a rental of 34,000,000*l.*, leaving them on an average 170*l.* a year; and of those a great many must have of course much more, and a great many must have much less. In fact, I believe that, if the question were examined, it will be found that the great fortunes are not among the landed proprietors of England, but in other classes of the community. And when they talk of throwing the burden of taxation on that body, I want to know what the statesmen of the north of England, the yeomen of the south, and the co-partners of Lincolnshire, who have succeeded their fathers in the cultivation of the soil, and are as little competent to bear exclusive taxation as any class, will say. Nor can I believe it to be at all clear, if I turn to the other great branch of realised property, that it will be found a mere aristocratic element either. I need not remind the House that at the last payment of the dividends, 300,000 warrants were issued, of which one third were for sums not exceeding 5*l.*; 50,000 warrants for sums not exceeding, and many less than, 10*l.*; and the very few large sums of which we hear so much include the investments of banking and insurance companies, which is the capital of this commercial world. Therefore, I can fancy nothing more fallacious, nothing more delusive, nothing more unworthy of the talents and intelligence of the member for the West Riding than the doctrine of exclusive taxation on what he calls the realised property of this country.

What does all this mean? Sympathy for the people, a deference to popular interests, a regard for popular rights? Let me remind the House, not of a chance expression used in the heat of debate, but of an expression which has been repeated, and in cold blood. Have we not heard it stated here, by no less a person than the honourable member for Manchester, that the gentlemen opposite to me are a middle-class Government—that they look to the middle class for power, and the middle class look to them for their advantage? A few years ago was it not held out as the greatest opprobrium that the agricultural interest was supported by class legislation? Were we not told on every occasion, on every opportunity, in every manner, that class legislation was the great evil of the country? But now that they have obtained their ends; now that they have passed their measures; now that

their beautiful commercial system is working its results ; now that they think they have confirmed themselves in political authority and Parliamentary power, they have the unblushing front to say the Government shall be a middle-class Government, and shall work solely for the middle classes.<sup>1</sup> Sir, I do not believe that after all that has occurred, gentlemen here are so dull in apprehension, or so dead in spirit, that they will submit, without a struggle, to this. No, Sir ; if we have thought it wise to terminate those commercial distinctions which are supposed—I think, erroneously—to have affected our social condition, it will be but a poor consolation for us to discover that the only return we have for a diminished revenue and a declining commerce, is the arrogant authority of a class who obtained power by false pretences, and now, possessing it, attempt to exercise it merely for their own advantage.

<sup>1</sup> A definite plan for effecting this object was unfolded by Mr. Cobden in a letter written privately to Sir Robert Peel, June 23, 1846. *Vide* Mr. Morley's *Life of Cobden*.

LOCAL TAXATION, March 8, 1849.<sup>1</sup>

[Reciprocity being impossible, the next best thing was to obtain compensation for the landed interest: and the following is the first of a series of speeches directed to that object. The other three were delivered on July 2, 1849, February 19, 1850, and February 11, 1851. Mr. Disraeli, on the death of Lord George Bentinck, had now become the leader of the Conservative party in the House of Commons, which in the previous session scarcely numbered 120 votes. Lord George Bentinck on the division of the session—that, namely, on Irish Railways—could only rally 118 followers to his banner. Mr. Disraeli had a twofold task before him. He had not only to serve a great interest: he had to reconstruct a great party. And his efforts in the House of Commons from 1849 to 1852 must be considered with reference to both these objects. It was not to be supposed that even in the excitement and irritation of the Protectionist controversy men had entirely forgotten everything which had gone before. They could not forget that the Conservative party had been called into existence to combat other dangers as well as that of Free Trade. Thirty years ago the doctrine of Whig Conservatism, now quite familiar to the public, was yet unborn. The Whigs were still supposed to be the great party of innovation, whose enmity to the Church, whose mismanagement of Ireland, and whose failures in finance, the Tories had been called to counteract. Mr. Disraeli, then, on assuming the leadership, at once inculcated on his supporters the necessity and the feasibility of healing the schism in the party, and recovering the body of seceders. The accomplishment of this object was paramount to every other consideration. He commenced his labours in 1849 with a motion for a select committee to inquire into the ‘Burdens upon Land’ or the unfair pressure of taxation on the agricultural classes. The Peelites were, as country gentlemen, still deeply interested in obtaining compensation for their tenantry. As Free-traders, they were precluded from supporting anything which savoured of Protection. But a motion which claimed a boon for the landed interest, without any taint of the exploded system, would

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

be sure to meet with their approval, and probably with their open support. And to accustom the 'Peelites' to find themselves in the same lobby with the Conservatives upon questions of common interest was a primary object with the statesman whose policy was reconciliation. The accuracy of his judgment was proved by the result of the division ; there being for the motion 189, to 280 against it—an increase of at least forty votes upon the largest number of supporters which the Conservatives had hitherto mustered.]

MR. DISRAELI: Sir, I rise with the hope that I may induce the House of Commons to adopt a great measure of justice, of conciliation, and of policy. It is not my intention, on this occasion, to enter into any details demonstrative of the great distress which exists among the agricultural classes of this country. Whether that distress exist or not, is unnecessary for the argument which I mean to recommend to the attention of the House in the resolutions which I have placed on the table. It is still less necessary to enter into these details, because there is a great authority for saying that this distress does exist. It is only a few nights since an honourable gentleman, a member of this House, came forward and offered his voluntary evidence, if it were necessary, to establish the fact—a witness not to be suspected of any morbid sympathy for the agricultural class—I mean the honourable member for Manchester (Mr. Bright). He told us the other night that he could not conceal from himself that the distress among the agricultural class was severe and terrible. I am willing to allow this state of affairs to rest on the testimony of that honourable member. Nor am I going to enter into any inquiry as to the cause of this distress. That is not essential or necessary to the argument which I mean to offer in support of the resolutions which I have placed on the table. But if I wanted to know what was the cause of that distress, I would also appeal to another witness on the benches opposite, one that will be admitted by all as a great and unimpeachable authority—I mean the honourable member for the West Riding (Mr. Cobden). That honourable gentleman on a recent memorable occasion, when he communicated to his assembled fellow-countrymen the programme of his future policy, spoke of the farmers of England with much sympathy, lamented



their condition, and acknowledged—which was creditable to his candour and frankness—that in recent changes they had not been fairly dealt with. Nor, in the third place, is it my intention to-night to enter into any controversy as to those changes. It is not, I say, my intention to-night to enter into any controversy as to the policy or impolicy of those changes in the law to which the honourable member referred; I am satisfied with allowing, with the honourable member for the West Riding, that the agricultural classes have not been fairly treated in them. I hold the opinions on those measures such as I have frequently intimated, and sometimes attempted to develop, to the House.

I still believe that our new commercial system is founded on erroneous principles. I still believe that in constructing this new system you have mistaken the rules which regulate an advantageous interchange of commodities between nations; and that in attempting to obviate the injury and inconvenience of hostile tariffs, by opening our ports, we have adopted a course which tends to the depression of British industry; and that under your new system the native labourer must give more of his produce for foreign produce than he heretofore gave; that inasmuch as the precious metals are foreign products, he must consequently receive less of the precious metals for his labour, and have less command over them than he had before; that his labour is tributary to foreign countries in the precise proportion in which it has become less efficient in its command over foreign products; and that you have thus embarked in a course which tends to the degradation of native industry, and which may end in financial convulsion. I still believe that there is but one way to extricate the country from the calamities which it now experiences, and those which are impending—and that is by the frank adoption of the principle of reciprocity as the fundamental principle of your commercial code; and that such is the only means to be pursued against hostile tariffs and countervailing duties. I have expressed these opinions on this and on other legitimate occasions, because I wish these principles to be pondered over by the country, with the hope, and even the belief, they will ultimately adopt them. Perilous and injurious

as I hold the late changes in our commercial system, I do not wish suddenly to subvert them by appealing to the passions of any suffering classes, or by any party combinations; I wish the change when effected to be permanent, and it can only be permanent by its being called for by the common sense of the country. I look, therefore, for this change to be effected by legitimate means, by public discussion, by private investigation, by the failure of economic prophecies, and by the fruit of sharp experience. On the present occasion, I wish to avoid any angry controversy; but I am unwilling that anyone should suppose that I shrink from opinions which I have formerly expressed in this House; on the contrary, the observation of every day and of every hour only confirms me in my convictions.

After the change of 1846, which so greatly affected the agricultural interests, I think they are entitled at least to this—that our system of taxation should not press unjustly on them. That is the first proposition which I wish to lay down. The second is, that the unjust taxation of which they complain should be revised, and that there should be a redistribution of these burdens, according to just principles—a redistribution which I believe will afford them, though by no means complete, yet considerable relief from the sufferings which they are now enduring. The question which I have to place before the House requires, fortunately, very little statistical detail. Although great controversy has taken place between different interests, as to which had to bear the heaviest burdens, I feel that the question which I have to bring forward is in itself extremely simple, and, like other first principles, is clear and easy of apprehension. It seems, by returns now in the possession of all of us, that the amount of poor and other rates for the year ending Lady-day 1848 was a sum of not less than 10,000,000*l.* sterling, and that this was levied by direct taxation on the real property of England. This amount was made up by the poor-rate and its collateral minor rates, and by the county rate, the highway rate, and the church rate, all of which were levied on real property. I ask you whether the time has not at last come for inquiring whether it is just that a sum of not less than 10,000,000*l.* annually should thus be levied, and

only levied on the real property of the country. But, independently of this sum of 10,000,000*l.*, there are other direct taxes, levied on real property, which, strictly speaking, are local taxes. For instance, the land tax is assessed and levied by local authorities, and each locality is fixed with the payment of a certain quota, so that I may assert that the real property of this country pays 12,000,000*l.*, of taxes a year to which no other species of property is subject. To place this question before us in a manner which must carry conviction, let us first ascertain the amount of property upon which this 12,000,000*l.* is levied, and then compare that amount with the probable annual amount of the whole income of the country. We have the materials for this calculation. Every gentleman knows that this 10,000,000*l.*—I might say, generally speaking, 12,000,000*l.*—is raised on a rental contributed by real property to the amount of 67,000,000*l.* per annum. This 10,000,000*l.* then, I repeat, is assessed on a rental of 67,000,000*l.* There is no difficulty in ascertaining what is the total income of England at this moment. We have a Parliamentary paper—moved for by an honourable gentleman opposite—numbered 747; it gives the sum of the the income-tax levied, and the description and amount of the property on which it was levied, in England and Wales for the year 1846. This return was laid on the table in 1847, and by a reference to it anyone can easily calculate what is the total national income liable to this tax. According to this paper, the total income for 1846, as contained in the five schedules, and chargeable with the income-tax, was 186,888,958*l.* But the 67,000,000*l.*, on which the local taxation is assessed, is not entirely contained in this greater sum, for that is confined to property above 150*l.* per annum, and even cottages are assessed to the poor-rates. In order, therefore, to ascertain the entire income of the country, including that portion which is exempted from the property and income tax—I shall adopt the rule laid down by a high and prudent authority, the member for Tamworth, when he introduced his scheme for a property-tax in 1842. The right honourable baronet then took the amounts of income under 150*l.* a year at a quarter of the whole income of the country, so that to the

amount of 186,888,958*l.* chargeable with the property-tax, the sum of 62,296,319*l.* must be added as the amount of income not chargeable with that tax. These sums make together 249,185,277*l.* sterling as the total income of the country.

Now, the question which I wish to ask the House is, why should this ten or twelve millions sterling of direct taxation be levied only upon a portion of the whole income of the country—a portion little more than a fourth of the whole amount? This is a simple question—one, however, which the country is deeply interested in, and which a great portion of the inhabitants of this country are daily asking. It is requisite that this should be kept clear of all statistical mystification. The income of the country is upwards of 249,000,000*l.*, and yet, for the purposes to which I refer, the assessment is only upon one-fourth of the income of the country. Now, upon what principle of justice do you defend this? What are the objects of these local taxes? The maintenance of the poor of the country; the maintenance of our means of internal communication; the administration of justice, and the support of the sacred edifices of the country. Are these not matters in which all the property of the country is equally interested? Upon what plea can you vindicate the principle which makes only one-fourth of the income of the country liable to these great charges? This question has been incidentally asked the House before; treated cursorily—I might even observe without offence to anyone, superficially.

Attempts have often been made to raise idle and odious controversies as to the classes which contributed most to the poor-rate, and as to which ought to contribute most to that rate. There have been endless controversies of this kind. It has been on the one side said that the agricultural interest bore most of the burden, and then it was asserted that the house property in towns contributed equally to it. I do not mean to enter into any discussion on these points. I have no wish to shut my eyes to the fact that during the last half century great changes have taken place in the relations borne to each other by the different descriptions of real property. Far from it; I rejoice in the circumstance as a proof of the progress and prosperity of the country, and that a great amount of fixed

capital has thus been invested in the land of the country. I agree that the dwellers in towns are assessed to the relief of the poor in such an amount that it is not at all surprising to me that they are clamorous. I admit that they contribute not only in an ample but an excessive manner; and that they may well consider it to be a grievance. I quite sympathise with the owners of real property in towns as to their grievous and heavy assessment. The measure, however, which it is my intention to propose, if the House will go into committee to-night, will relieve the suffering towns from this burden. It will put an end to those complaints of which we have heard so much from Manchester, Bradford, and other great seats of manufacturing industry. I sympathise with their sufferings; I acknowledge their grievance, and I say it is a vital question to the owners of real property in towns, whether only one-fourth of the property of the country should have the whole burden of local taxation thrown upon it. So it is with other descriptions of real property, the owners of which loudly complain of their rating to the maintenance of the poor. Nothing, for instance, can be more monstrous than the amount of rating on railways for the poor. I quite agree in the justice of their complaints; but I am scarcely prepared to adopt the remedy which has been suggested—namely, the placing the whole burden on the agricultural interest. I acknowledge the grievance as regards railways having to pay so much on their property, while this charge is made to fall on only one-fourth of the property of the country. If that interest supports the general measure of justice which I hope to introduce to the House, and if it should be adopted, it would relieve them from this great ground of complaint. It is the same with other great trading companies, such as those which supply us with water and light, and who are perpetually wrangling on the subject of poor-rates. I think their complaints perfectly just.

Some of my friends think it very well arranged if they can visit a considerable part of these burdens on some of the great companies. On the contrary, I feel for the proscribed interests of real property in every form. I think it most unjust that these water and gas companies should be visited with the

portion of taxation they have to bear, when they are only a section of the one-fourth of the property of the country. The injustice upon them is most gross, and they will have the opportunity of obtaining redress by supporting the measures I am now anxious to introduce—measures founded in justice, and which, therefore, I believe, will succeed. If we calmly consider this matter in the abstract; if, for example, we were not in England, but travelling in some foreign country, and for the first time became acquainted with a system of finance so remarkable—if we were in a strange land, and learned for the first time that, independently of bearing their share of the whole taxation of the country, there was a private and separate revenue to an enormous amount assessed only upon a fourth part of the property of the realm; what would be the conclusion we should draw? We should say, ‘This must be that part of the nation that probably is the remnant of some conquered race—this must be some proscribed and oppressed section of the country. *Væ victis!* Here is the fruit of a vassalage, which even our civilisation and our political economy have not terminated.’ Such might, perhaps, be our conclusion. But who could suppose that this was the peculiar privilege of the rapacious aristocracy—of the persons who have made all the laws—of the persons who, according to the doctrines of the most enlightened of those who now instruct us, have always made those laws for their own advantage? But the most curious thing, the most anomalous part of this unparalleled state of affairs is that this is not the law of the country. The law of England, which has always been the law of common sense, never for a moment anticipated a conclusion so monstrous and so oppressive. I need not now, considering that those whom I now address are familiar with all these details, remind them that the old statutes never enforced, or for a moment anticipated, such a monstrous injustice. That benign and sagacious law the forty-third of Elizabeth enacted that all the inhabitants of England, according to their means, should contribute henceforth to the relief and support of the poor.

We all know very well that in comparatively modern times—in the time of William and Mary—when the land-tax was

first legally established, that tax was called only in common parlance a land-tax, but that it was in fact a tax upon property of all kinds. This is not a question of controversy. To this day the land-tax is levied on certain offices under the Crown; offices existing in the time of William and Mary pay their 4s. in the pound to the present day. I believe the Judges of the land pay this tax—a tax, however, I am glad to believe, assessed upon their allowance as settled in the reign of William and Mary, and not of our present gracious Sovereign. Honourable gentlemen well know that the courts of law have repeatedly in modern times, even in our own times, decided that in this country property of all kinds is liable to those imposts which real property only has continued to bear. And I may remind honourable gentlemen that stock-in-trade only escapes the imposition every year by an annual Bill—an annual Bill passed by that same rapacious aristocracy which thus exempt stock-in-trade from poor-rate, and inflict the whole of it upon that kind of property in which they are peculiarly interested. In the first place, then, I ask honourable gentlemen what reason can be advanced why, for the objects for which these rates are raised, and these taxes levied, the whole property of a district—I ask no more in the first instance—should not be liable? Whether a man's property be in broad acres, or whether he receive his means from any other sources, surely in either case it is equally liable to the maintenance of the poor; surely he equally in the district uses the roads; surely he equally in the district is interested in the administration of justice; and surely he equally—at least, for the sake of his soul, I hope so—goes to church. As a matter of justice, it seems that no argument can be adduced against the plea. An adverse expediency, indeed, may be suggested.

You may say that the system has gone on for a long time, and that it would be most difficult, if not impossible, to extricate ourselves from it. You may say, for example, that nothing is more difficult than to tax personal property in a locality—that it is not only invidious and inquisitorial, but perhaps even impossible. There are arguments, if you choose to call them arguments, which may be used; but no one can say that they

meet the principle of justice which is involved in this question—no one can lay down or sustain for a moment the proposition that it is just that all other property except real property should be exempt from these rates. It may be convenient, but no one can maintain that it is just. I will admit, fully, frankly and freely, that the inconvenience, perhaps impossibility, of rating personal property in a locality in a satisfactory manner, is indubitable; but I am of opinion, if we pursue this important inquiry in a less superficial spirit than it has hitherto, from various circumstances, commanded in this House, that we may perhaps find that these difficulties will disappear, and that some solution may be found for the problem. In the first place, it appears to me that a great deal of this difficulty arises from a confusion of terms—from the world persisting in inferring from the phrase local taxation as a necessary consequence that the purposes for which local taxation is inflicted are really of a local nature. I doubt whether it can be shown that the purposes for which this taxation is locally levied are of a local nature. On the contrary, I think they are for purposes of a much wider and more comprehensive character. I will take, for example, the first and most important tax thus directly levied—that for the maintenance of the poor. I know of no reason *a priori* why the maintenance of the poor should be the duty of a locality. The maintenance of the poor is either a matter of police, or a social duty. In looking over the ancient statutes, it may probably appear that our predecessors viewed the matter in the more limited light of police: that it was considered if the people were allowed to perish of famine, mendicity and violence would be necessary consequences; and certainly the most convenient to defend the person from assault, and property from famine, is a poor-law. But I do not understand how, even in this limited view of the question, it is just that a contribution for the purpose should be drawn from one or even from two classes. I believe, however, that the question is to be regarded in a far higher point of view. We recognise throughout this country—and I venture to say it is recognised, without exception, in this House—the principle that the maintenance of the poor is a social duty—a duty justified by high State policy,



and consecrated by the sanction of religion. But if the maintenance of the poor be a social duty, it is the duty of everyone according to his means; and in a country like England, an ancient country, of complicated civilisation, it is totally impossible that you can lay down as a principle that a particular district should support its own poor, unless you can prove, at the same time, that that district produced those poor: nay, unless you can go further than that—unless you can ensure that district against the consequences of metropolitan or imperial legislation, that these shall not interfere with the employment and labour of those poor. Why, the very transition from war to peace throws a whole district out of employment; yet that district—that parish—had not undertaken war or declared peace, and therefore is not responsible for the maintenance of those whose employment has been destroyed by the one or the other. This is a view of the question which, if followed up in a country like England, will throw a light upon a variety of circumstances. The alteration of a fashion occasions poverty in a district. The invention of a machine in Lancashire will have the effect of throwing a whole village in Northamptonshire out of employ. What are the facts in regard to many of those rural districts of England which have been held up to public reprobation for not employing their poor, and in which an intolerable pauperism has been declared to be one of the consequences of the system of protection? Why, that those parts of the country were once the seats of manufactures, and that a population has been left there by the obsolete manufactures, the labour of which the land has never been able to absorb. This is the cause of that misery and poverty which has prevailed in some of the western counties, and which have been adduced by some honourable gentlemen as the consequence of protection; forgetting that in some purely agricultural countries—Lincolnshire, for example—where there are no obsolete manufactures, wages are very high. So Mr. Huskisson was accustomed to explain the low wages of Sussex as occasioned by a population created by an iron manufacture that no longer flourished. How, therefore, can you call upon a particular district to maintain its own population in an ancient

realm, where, from the state of society, such inequalities of condition and such fluctuations of employment must exist? Some may urge that the maintenance of the poor should properly be thrown upon their employers—upon those who have profited by their labour. But in ninety-nine cases out of one hundred, the very circumstances which threw the labouring classes out of employment are the causes also of the distress of their employers. If I take the highway rates as an example, the same view of the question immediately arises. It is very easy to make flippant observations in debate, and to say, Why don't the farmers pay for the roads made for their use? But, in the first place, it is not historically true that these roads were made for the farmers. If the agricultural classes had the monopoly of these roads; if no one but these classes used these roads; if they were what are called private roads, then there might be some strength in the position. But inasmuch as everybody uses these roads, and as, until railways were discovered, these roads were covered with all the travelling clerks of the manufacturing establishments in England; inasmuch as you have settled by a law that a stranger, although he contribute not one farthing to the maintenance of these roads, can indict the parish if the wheel of his vehicle be injured, you must admit that the public ways are for public purposes, and for public use.

I want to know what item of our expenditure can bear this analysis of local purposes and local objects. Take the case of a gentleman living in a Midland county, who, in consequence of the distress which prevails, takes to looking into the estimates—a habit which I believe is growing upon gentlemen in many parts of the country. He finds there, for example, an item of some five or seven hundred thousand pounds for the packet service. He might say, 'Why am I to be called upon to pay for this packet service? Three-fourths of the letters are carried for the merchants of London and Liverpool, and the other fourth would not be carried at all were it not for them. What have I to do with this? Let a rate for it be struck upon London and Liverpool.' This would be a clear case for local taxation to one living in a Midland county. Or say that the

same gentleman, like the King of Bohemia, not accustomed to the sea, might observe the vote for harbours of refuge: he might object to it on the same grounds, and say, 'I have no ships—I have nothing to do with harbours. Let a rate be struck upon the Cinque Ports.' Or, living in a purely agricultural district, he might cavil at the vote for the inspectors of factories. But he does not take that limited view of finance which our financial reformers perhaps do. Year after year in a wise, and generous, and national spirit, he contributes to all these sources of expense, and never cavils. But if you pursue the inquiry to subjects of much greater extent and moment, you will find the case still more strongly telling in favour of the oppressed class liable to this particular revenue.

Take this case. About six years ago the merchants of Liverpool were very much vexed and, as they thought, oppressed by certain proceedings in a distant quarter, and they besieged Downing Street with memorials and endless reclamations, calling upon Government to interfere by force and defend their property and their commercial transactions. The minister who then presided in Downing Street—a very experienced and able, and, until that moment, considered a peculiarly cautious statesman—moved by these representations of the Liverpool merchants, was induced to interfere in the troubled waters of La Plata. And what has been the consequence? Six years have elapsed and the country gentleman in the Midland county, who willingly acceded to the great expenditure because he thought it was for the sake of the commerce of his country, now finds, as the only result, the same merchants of Liverpool attacking the Government of the country on account of our extravagant armaments, and declaring that they are only kept up to support the younger children of the landed aristocracy. I say that this is a clear case for striking a rate upon Liverpool—that it is a clear case for local taxation. And we could bear this great burden of 10,000,000*l.* or 12,000,000*l.* if the rest of the taxation were apportioned in the same spirit. But is that so? Look at the instance of Manchester a few years back. Manchester was of opinion that the Chinese Empire, possessing three hundred millions or more of human beings, was the best

customer that could be obtained for our manufactures ; that the home trade, or even the European trade, was nothing in comparison with that of a nation possessing such a population ; that if each man only spent as much Sycie silver as a sovereign in each year, the fortunes of our manufacturers must be made. And so by dint of pertinacity and restlessness and commercial intrigues, they forced the Government into a war with China.

Now, in this case the landed gentleman, being not quite so dull as you have sometimes been pleased to picture him, might naturally have said, 'It is true I have never been in the country, but still I know something about China. I inherited a magnificent library from my father, and in some of the books there I have read that, notwithstanding the three hundred millions of inhabitants in China, they will never be able to carry on a commensurate commerce with this country, because really they have nothing to give in exchange for our goods.' What the country gentleman foresaw did happen ; for never was there a greater disappointment than that manifested in Manchester at the practical results of the China trade. They acknowledged, it was true, China afforded very few commodities for exchange, but still it possessed one great article of commerce, and they said we must reduce the duty on tea, and so increase the consumption. But the country gentleman might answer, 'I find that England already consumes more than fifty millions of pounds of tea annually, and I have my doubts whether such an increased consumption be necessary or even desirable. Too much tea is not good for the nerves. Why not take the duty off malt, and let the people revert to that beverage which their Saxon ancestors loved, and which produced that long-lived race which I trust I shall aid in continuing ?'

When this China business was at an end, therefore, why not, upon this system of local taxation, call for a rate to be struck against Manchester on account of the Chinese war ? The same principle holds good with regard to the county rate and the church rate. I will, for a moment, touch upon the subject of the county rate, because it is one in regard to which great mistakes have been made, and great misconceptions prevail.

The county rate is a direct tax raised for the purposes of the administration of justice. About the year 1835, as is known to the House, the Government, aware of this unjust burden which pressed upon the land, principally occasioned by the expense of the execution of justice, offered to pay half the cost of criminal prosecutions. That was done without much public attention being given to the matter, but the general impression in the House and throughout the country was, to a great degree, I believe, that the landed interest had, as usual, taken advantage of the minister in a weak moment, and had by some means got rid of one of the just burdens upon themselves, and thrown it upon the community at large. That was in the year 1835. I want to show you how this county rate is expended; and to clear this case from the misconceptions which are so popular in the public mind, I must call your attention to the manner in which it has been expended, at a period so recent as 1845. I take that period because subsequently, in 1846, another change was made by the right honourable gentleman the member for Tamworth, in reference to the county rate. I will venture to refer to my own experience during one day at assizes, to show the nature of this county rate—how it acts upon a county, and how far and in what degree a county may be actually interested in cases of its expenditure. A woman comes down into the county with which I am connected, to a well-known place, Salthill, on the borders of Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. She comes as a stranger, and takes an obscure lodging in a public-house. A few days afterwards, a man, previously connected with this woman, comes down to the place by railway, visits her, and murders her. He leaves Salthill, and proceeds to town by train. By means of the electric telegraph he is arrested the moment he arrives at the station in London, the murder having been immediately discovered. He is therefore arrested in London; but the crime was committed in Buckinghamshire. So the man is taken back to Salthill, examined, and committed to the county gaol at Aylesbury. The case was of a kind which required the evidence of scientific men, who were summoned from various parts of England. It was a very expensive trial. The prisoner was convicted, and

outraged society was vindicated by the execution of Tawell. Now, although half the expense of criminal prosecutions is defrayed by Government—and so defrayed, I have heard it insinuated, unjustly—the bill, and the just bill, of costs of the clerk of the peace for the county of Bucks in the case to which I have referred amounted to 300*l*. I ask, what had this county to do with that crime? The man was not born in Buckinghamshire, or resident there, or even arrested there. But this is only one of the modes in which the county rate was expended only very recently.

Take another instance on the same day. A bargeman, who had committed a robbery in Rutlandshire or Northamptonshire, was arrested on one of the canals in Buckinghamshire, on which he was navigating a cargo of coals. His trial and conviction cost the county upwards of 100*l*., although he had no more to do with that county than with the House of Commons. There was, on the same day, another case, very significant, that of a draper in a flourishing town in the same county, in whose shop a burglary was committed, and property stolen to the amount of 20*l*. The burglar was arrested, sent to the county gaol, tried, and the whole expense was paid out of the county rate, while the stock-in-trade of the very tradesman to vindicate whose rights of property the expense was incurred was exempted from contributing to that rate. Mark this—if the vexation and oppression of counties paying only half the expense of criminal prosecutions were so grievously, so essentially, and so palpably unjust, what must it have been before the change in 1835? Doubly unjust, doubly oppressive, doubly grievous, doubly tyrannical. Yet that change has been described as one of the methods by which the landed interest shuffle off their burdens upon others.

In 1846, I admit that the right honourable baronet the member for Tamworth took off the other moiety of the charge upon the county rate, so that no further bills like that for the prosecution of Tawell can be charged upon them, and no further oppression like that in the case of the bargeman can be practised. But how was that act of tardy justice done? The right honourable gentleman on that occasion acknowledged the jus-

tice of the case to be unimpeachable. He did not pretend that there could be a question about the justice of the public incurring these expenses that had been theretofore met by the different counties for the vindication of public justice and the rights of society. But the right honourable gentleman gave that relief to the landed interest upon the memorable occasion—with respect to which I intend to have no discussion now—on which he deprived them of that important protection which they had so long enjoyed. This act of taking off the charge upon the county rate for the last half of the expenses of criminal prosecutions was the important measure of compensation given on that occasion—yet in itself a claim so just that it appears as if all required to enforce it was that it should be properly stated to the House; and that there could be no gentleman, whatever his political opinions or his party, but who would think it was not only unjust, but something shabby, to make a particular class pay for those expenses in which the whole nation is interested. But with great difficulty, and by the exertion only of all the influence of a powerful minister, was this tardy justice done in a slight degree to the owners and occupiers of land. And what has been the result as far as relief from the rate is concerned? The county rates are increased in amount, notwithstanding the Government has undertaken the whole expense of criminal prosecutions. The increase in this impost is accounted for by gentlemen who never inquire into the subject, to our neglect in never attending to our own affairs—by the levy of this tax not being placed in the power of the community of the county. The honourable member for Montrose has often urged that argument.

In the first place, let me show you that though the State has relieved the counties from the burden of criminal prosecutions, the whole of the county rates of this country, with the exception of one important item relating to the public works of universal benefit—I mean bridges—are still expended, generally speaking, upon the administration of justice. I have here the last abstract of the accounts of the treasurer for the county of Bucks, and I have reason to believe that it is a fair specimen of what occurs in other counties. After a certain expenditure

for bridges—heavy in a county through which the Thames passes, and on which Buckinghamshire, although not a rich county, has been obliged to disburse, for one instance recently (Marlow bridge), 27,000*l.*, the expenditure of the county, with that exception, is somewhere about 12,000*l.* a year. The whole of this is caused by the expenses for the administration of justice, clerks of the peace, coroners, maintenance of gaols, lock-up houses, conveyance of prisoners, and so on. The allowance from Government for the prosecution and maintenance of prisoners under particular circumstances, is less than 4,000*l.* ; and therefore two-thirds of the expenditure of that county and every other is in fact for the administration of justice—for matters that interest all—for a cause in which all are concerned. But we are often told, as I have shown, that the county rate, notwithstanding the Government of the country has come forward for the relief of the counties, is still increasing, and it is because those who administer the funds of the counties are unequal to their duties: that is the position of the honourable member for Montrose. (Mr. Hume: Hear, hear!) I tell you that if you go to the finance committee of the county of Buckingham you will find your match. But you forget that, year after year, you have been passing laws in this House, forcing the counties to raise most expensive public buildings, and giving them no option whatever. The honourable member for Montrose talks of the management of funds. Why, all that the magistrates can do is to assemble as trustees under Acts of Parliament, and declare the rate to meet the expenditure which you in your present capacity have agreed to incur.

I do not deny that those model prisons to which my noble friend (Viscount Mahon) referred in his interesting motion to-night are of great importance; I do not deny that the advancing philanthropy of the age does call for those erections and for the seclusion of this improved discipline. But what I assert is that this is a great national object, and nothing can be more unfair than that a highly enlightened and philanthropic senate should pass laws obliging a particular district to raise most expensive public buildings, and then refuse to defray the increased cost. Well, then, I say that this local taxation is not



raised for local purposes ; it is raised for national purposes. I am perfectly aware of the objection that you will make. The fact is, that the revenue of the country has been raised for a long time under two systems : there is the modern system of indirect taxation, to which all are subject ; and there is the old system of direct taxation, to which only landed property was subject—a system which has its coils round that property still, and mulcts it at its pleasure.

It would not be difficult to show how, in the course of time, this anomalous state of affairs has come to pass ; how it has happened that the real property of the country should necessarily have become subject to what is called the general taxation of the country, like other descriptions of property, and yet, at the same time, has been obliged to bear the burden of another revenue of the enormous amount of 12,000,000*l.* sterling. This anomaly has long been recognised ; the grievance, I am sure, has long been felt ; but the difficulties of dealing with it have been considerable. I am perfectly aware of the remedy which certain gentlemen opposite would be only too glad to offer me, and which they say is the necessary inference from my system—namely, that you should have recourse to a system of national rating. I have myself the greatest objections to that system, both of an economical and a political kind. I do not see how you can have the check which is requisite to the administration of funds in a district if the rating is national, and I am unwilling to give up the local administration, not merely because it insures economical management, or at least takes the best means of doing so, but for political reasons, connected with our happy habit of self-government, of a still graver character.

But though I admit that our system of self-government and our system of local administration are very precious, I must, at the same time, ask honourable gentlemen whether they are prepared to insure economy by practising injustice ; whether, in fact, they are going to lay down, as one of the principles of our social system, that in order to insure a good local administration of affairs, it is necessary that one or two particular classes in the country should be subjected to an unjust and oppressive taxation. Sir, I am well aware that in laying down

the principle that real property ought no more to bear unjust taxation than other sorts of property, some honourable gentlemen, confining their objections to a particular section of real property, will tell me that landed property is favoured otherwise by our laws. The probate and legacy duties will, I dare say, be brought forward. Now, for my own part—I am speaking only for myself, but I believe I may speak for others on this head—I am perfectly prepared to enter into an investigation of that subject in the fairest spirit, and to join with you in any endeavour for the equitable apportionment of that taxation; but I protest against this matter being now brought under the notice of the House to divert them from the question I have raised. Propose a committee to go into the whole subject of probate and legacy duty, and I will support you in your motion; and bring forward a measure founded upon sound information and real research, offering a just remedy, and I will give my vote in its favour; but I am bound to tell you—it would be disingenuous not to tell you—that, having given as much attention as I could to the investigation of this question, it is my opinion that the result of the committee will be very different to that which many of you expect. So much has been said upon this subject that I must take this opportunity of stating that of the legacy duty, which is now paid to the amount of 1,200,000*l.* a year, 500,000*l.* is paid absolutely and directly by land; that all leasehold property, all ecclesiastical tenures, are not included in that 500,000*l.*, and that they pay not only legacy duty, but probate duty. As far as what is called the landed interest is concerned, there is also included in your probate and legacy duty the stock of every farmer and cultivator of land, so that you will find, if you examine this subject with that attention it deserves, and with that absence of passion which I doubt not will mark your inquiry, that it is not the land which pays the least proportion either of the probate or legacy duty.

I have said nothing of the present arrangement of stamp duties, which would greatly strengthen my case. I make these observations to the honourable gentleman (Mr. Hume) in no hostile spirit; I remember my promise, and will redeem it if he gives me the opportunity; but I must protest against the

honourable gentleman or anybody else, especially after what I have said, introducing these extraneous subjects into the simple question I am placing before you. Is it just or unjust that real property, forming one-fourth of the income of the country, should alone bear burdens imposed on account of matters in which all property is equally interested? The honourable gentleman, if he take a fine house in Berkshire to-morrow, will, I dare say, trot over the roads in his neighbourhood; perhaps he may be a preserver of game; perhaps his keeper may be shot by a poacher; perhaps he will prosecute the poacher at the assizes; and he will do all this without paying to the highway or county rates. Well then, the question is, what, under these circumstances, is the best measure for settling this long-vexed question? I am afraid I shall disappoint honourable gentlemen who have very sedulously announced that all I was going to do was to move for a committee, when, instead of doing that, I express my readiness, if the House will go into committee, to offer a plan for their adoption; and as that plan is founded on justice, and conceived in a spirit of conciliation, I hope it has every chance of success.

I am perfectly aware that in attempting to settle this question nothing can be more unwise than for the possessors of real property to stickle too severely for their rights. I admit that in a country like England, where a system has existed for a considerable period, however unjust and oppressive the system may be—though the period of its duration does not alter the character of the arrangements or mitigate the nature of the oppression—yet, still I am aware that where a system has long existed, clear as may be our case, it is necessary and wise to approach the circumstances in a spirit of compromise. I do not say, as I have a right to say, ‘These are national purposes, and the local taxation for these national purposes is levied upon one-fourth of the income of the country; we are ready to pay our quota, but you have no right to ask us to pay more; we are ready to pay our due proportion of the 10,000,000*l.* or 12,000,000*l.*, but you cannot allege any reason or principle that calls upon us to undertake a more extensive responsibility.’ It is of the greatest importance to maintain the local administration of affairs that at

present exists, and therefore I shall not propose in any way to change the system of self-government that at present exists, or interfere with the present levy of rates. But I say that, considering all the circumstances of the case ; considering that the land has some slight exemptions which are really of very little import, but which may be remembered at this moment, amounting altogether, I believe, only to 140,000*l.* a year ; considering the great importance of maintaining the present local administration of affairs, and also that this is a moment in which every portion of the community, and every class and body, must be prepared to make great sacrifices, in a spirit of compromise and conciliation I shall propose that, the present system of local administration remaining, the present levy of rates continuing, the local districts shall be responsible for one moiety of this taxation, and that the other moiety shall be contributed by the Consolidated Fund. I would propose also that the Government should regain this moiety from the privileged properties according to their quotas ; with some changes and modifications, the machinery at present existing would assist the Government in this result.

Now, Sir, I take that to be a just proposal. I think terms might have been demanded, founded upon justice to a comparatively extravagant degree ; but I think the proposal I have made is one which, after due reflection, will be considered by all a fair and reasonable proposition, founded upon justice, recommended by policy, and which, if adopted in practice, will give relief to the suffering portion of real property in a legitimate manner, not by demand of undue favour at the expense of the rest of the community, but by the simple recognition of their rights. I am at a loss to conceive whence the great opposition to this proposal can arise. I shall be surprised if any person in authority should rise in this House and maintain that this taxation of 10,000,000*l.* or 12,000,000*l.* is not a burden upon real property which no other description of property shares. As far as concerns that section of real property the distressed condition of which especially has induced me to come forward to-night, we have the opinion of the right honourable baronet the member for Tamworth fully recognis-

ing its burdens, in almost the last speech on the Corn Laws that he made before the year 1846. The right honourable gentleman placed his vindication of the Corn Laws when minister—I believe, so late as the year 1845—upon the acknowledged burdens on land, and he specified that system of taxation to which the resolutions I have laid on the table refer. The right honourable gentleman has changed his opinion on the policy of the Corn Laws: but that is no reason that he should have changed his opinions on these matters of fact. And, now, what may be the sentiments of the Prime Minister on this important subject? I am not going to quote ‘Hansard.’ It shall not be a speech. I will refer to a document much more interesting, written on a memorable occasion, when of all others a man would be sincere, thoughtful, grave, and weigh what he did say with a feeling of deep responsibility. When the noble lord failed in forming his Government, at the commencement of the year 1846, and communicated his failure to his sovereign in language befitting the occasion, he left recorded in that almost solemn document this passage:—

‘Lord John Russell is deeply sensible of the embarrassment caused by the present state of public affairs. He will be ready, therefore, to do all in his power, as a member of Parliament, to promote the settlement of that question which, in present circumstances, is the source of so much danger, especially to the welfare and peace of Ireland. Lord John Russell would have formed his ministry on the basis of a complete free trade in corn, to be established at once, without gradation or delay. He would have accompanied that proposal with measures of relief, to a considerable extent, of the occupiers of land from the burdens to which they are subjected.’

Well, that is a great authority in favour of the views I have endeavoured to enforce. The right honourable baronet and the noble lord are my witnesses in answer to the honourable gentleman, who no doubt will get up in his place and argue that real property is exempted from imposts which other property is subject to. Is it that Her Majesty’s ministers shrink from this great act of justice on the score of its impracticability? That can hardly be. It was only last year that they came for—

ward with a proposition to increase the income-tax, not to do a great act of justice, not to conciliate rival classes, not to support an injured or aggrieved interest, but to do what I never could make out unless it was to pay the militia. And, by the by, if the militia had been called out, there would have been a militia rate, for which real property alone would have been liable. Let me now inquire what reception I am to calculate on from that section of the House who are the pure professors of Liberal principles, the vindicators of men in every clime, whose hearts are always touched at every sound of injustice, and who are ever prompt to come forward to succour the oppressed. Are they going to complete the fullness of their Liberal professions, by maintaining that their properties shall be privileged? They can have no abstract hostility to the process I indicate; they are all of them admirers of direct taxation; we ourselves have suffered under it for many years; we wish that you too, should taste its fruits. Looking then, to the sanction of these views we have obtained from leading men, to the facility with which the machinery of the income-tax may, to a certain degree, be adopted in this behalf by the present Government, and the abstract preference of direct taxation expressed by honourable gentlemen opposite, I trust that this oppressed interest of real property has at length some chance of obtaining relief.

Sir, do not let the House imagine that the sufferings of that class are not considerable. Do not let them imagine that that portion of real property which is connected with the cultivation of land is not, at this moment, in a state of depression as terrible as has been announced by the honourable gentleman the member for Manchester. You see how eager they are to obtain relief by the petition I have placed upon the table this day for the repeal of the malt-tax. You see how the farmers of this country, immediately interested in the growth of barley, cry for the repeal of that tax. You find many of them not immediately interested in the growth of barley, not able perhaps to prove they can obtain any great relief from their sufferings, from the repeal of the malt-tax, labouring under a sense of oppression from this weight of unjust taxation—how eager they are to adopt the first remedy that is offered.

Sir, I have expressed in the second resolution that I have placed upon the table of the House my sincere opinion upon the subject of the malt-tax. When we remember that the landed interest, as a considerable portion of the real property of the country, is subject to the taxation I have referred to in the first resolution, it is a great aggravation when we consider that more than one-third of the revenue raised by the excise is contributed by taxes upon the articles of their growth. The circumstances connected with those taxes have been so frequently before the House that I will not trouble, by too much detail, gentlemen to whom they are familiar; but there are circumstances connected with propositions for relief with regard to those taxes, which must be well understood by the House before they can comprehend the feelings of the farmers upon the subject. Those suffering classes, Sir, cannot but remember that twenty years ago they made an appeal to the House of Commons for the repeal of those taxes, and what was the answer? The answer was, that the minister could not spare the revenue. He could not spare the three millions and a half which was then raised by the malt-tax. The farmers yielded to that representation of the Government; and next year, if I remember right, upwards of three millions and a half of taxation were taken off from other articles by the same Government. I do not want to go into the question whether it was a wise or an unwise act of the Government of that day; but I ask you what feelings it is calculated to engender if you treat the agricultural classes in that spirit? Are you surprised that they should remember such incidents with mortification and with lessened confidence in the leading men of this country? Well, Sir, what happened in the year 1835? The right honourable gentleman the member for Tamworth was then First Minister of this country—perhaps the most difficult and not the least distinguished portion of his eminent career. Upon that occasion, and in that year, there was great agricultural distress; and the great body of the agriculturists of England were of opinion that the repeal of the malt-tax might give them relief. There was a considerable commotion—in modern days called agitation—upon the subject. A noble lord (the Marquis of Chandos) who then represented

the county of Buckingham, and who is still remembered by the farmers of that county with respect for his faithful and consistent conduct, had pledged himself to bring forward a motion for the repeal of this tax; and, embarrassing and painful as was his position, upon account of the formation of the Government of the right honourable gentleman, he redeemed his pledge. How was the question then met? The right honourable gentleman exerted all his powers to refute the statements that were offered. He administered some solemn monitions to the landed gentlemen. The right honourable baronet said: 'Take care what you are about; you may get rid of the malt-tax, but I tell you what you will have instead—a good comfortable property-tax.' Never was such an effect produced upon the agricultural mind. They fled like sheep! Some came down to this House and rescinded their promises to their constituents. Others dreamed dreams and saw visions. But what have you got now? You have got the malt-tax; you have got the 'good comfortable property-tax;' and you have got all those burdens upon the land which you found so oppressive, and which the right honourable gentlemen to his last moments agreed were so oppressive, besides. Are you surprised, then, that the farmers of England, after such incidents as these, should be a little ill-tempered and unmanageable? For my part, I am not at all surprised that men so distressed and so burdened should fly to the first refuge for succour. When you recollect how often this question has been matured out of doors; how frequently it has been brought forward in this House with every chance of success; that once even, to complete the picture, the repeal was carried and rescinded immediately afterwards, are you surprised that the farmers should begin to feel some distrust in the conduct of public men?

Now, Sir, that this tax is an injury to the farmer I do not think anyone can for a moment deny. That it is a tax upon the consumer is no answer to this complaint. All our taxes are taxes upon the consumer. But that this restricts the demand for the farmer's produce is what no one can scarcely question. Why, Sir, Mr. M'Culloch, the political economist, and although a political economist, a very sensible man—and



without exception, I think, of all the economical writers, the most practical that I am acquainted with—Mr. M'Culloch, I say, in ascertaining in one of his works the amount of fixed duty which he thought ought to be granted to the land, upon account of, as he says, its being taxed more than other portions of the community—in the elements of his fixed duty, puts down the malt-tax as giving a claim for 2s. in that duty. This demand upon the part of the farmer is not so unreasonable as some would pretend. I do not dwell upon the domestic annoyances which this tax causes. They are known to all of us—they are felt by most of us—and they are the hourly conversation of these men at their markets.

Now, Sir, having frankly expressed my opinion upon the subject as far as regards past propositions and the amount of loss and annoyance to the farmer, I will, even at the risk of losing that favour which they have bestowed upon me, counsel them not to press for the repeal of the malt-tax. I will give you my reasons why. I advise them not to press for the repeal of the malt-tax, because I am convinced that the portion of benefit which they will receive will be very slight compared with the general inconvenience which it will occasion. That is my general reason; but my particular reason why I hope they will not press, and why I recommend them not to press, for the repeal of the malt-tax is that, if they obtain it at this moment, they will obtain what may prove a fatal obstacle to measures of relief such as that which I have proposed, and others which I hope we may be enabled to propose.

The measure which I have proposed or suggested to-night will allow me to take five or six millions of taxation from the real property of the country. Its benefits will be felt in every village and in every farm-house in the kingdom. Its advantages will also be felt in every town in the empire. It is not a sectional advantage—it is not a sectarian arrangement. It will benefit every farmer a hundred times more than the repeal of the malt tax; whilst he will feel, at the same time, that the great body of his countrymen not connected with agriculture are equally benefited by such a measure, founded on justice, the authority of which no one can impugn. Sir, if you deny

these men justice, against the flagrant and unanswerable complaint of the real property of the country—one-fourth in amount of the whole—being visited by the incubus of taxation to the extent of ten or twelve millions, from which the privileged properties are exempt, we must not conceal from ourselves that we shall have appeals for the repeal of the malt-tax and for the repeal of other taxes. You must not conceal from yourselves that you may make an oppressed and aggrieved population run a muck against your theories of trade and taxation.

I have been asked, Sir, by gentlemen from Ireland, whether I intend that the resolutions which I have placed upon the table should apply to their country? It is my intention that they should apply to Ireland. I can see no reason and no principle why that application should not be made. If I have not specially introduced the case of Ireland in debate, it has been because the analogous rates and taxes, and imposts, which are levied in that country, are levied by a different machinery; they would introduce different figures into the discussion, and complicate a proposition which I wished to keep perfect in the simplicity of its justice, unclouded with details which might distract the House from its fair and due consideration. But my intention, if a committee of the whole House will permit me to introduce the measure I have mentioned, is to follow it up by another measure which shall apply in the same spirit to Ireland. I cannot comprehend what arguments can be urged against Ireland being relieved in the same spirit of justice as England. I do not offer it to Ireland as a boon which is entirely to reanimate her in her present distressed condition, but it is an arrangement which she is entitled to call upon the landed interest of this country to insure to her if they themselves receive it with the other holders of real property; and I hope it may exercise a beneficial influence upon her condition. There are other measures which, I think, might do more for Ireland even than the present; and, Sir, if I do not bring them forward now, it is because I feel that this is not the occasion to introduce them.

I was taunted the other night by an honourable gentleman representing an Irish constituency, because I opposed the

proposition of the Government, and proposed nothing myself. The criticism is not just, and it is rather stale. It is neither new nor true. It is not our duty because we do not approve of a proposition of a minister, instantly to bring in a counter-proposition. I can easily understand, Sir, why honourable gentlemen opposite do not approve of an Opposition being in existence. But we are sensible of our duties, and we shall endeavour to fulfil them. I will, however, tell honourable gentlemen from Ireland that there is one measure, one means of assisting them, which I am most anxious to introduce to this House. It is a great, it is a comprehensive measure. I should wish to induce Irish gentlemen on either side to forget their fatal feuds, and to join with us in efforts to restore their depressed and prostrate country. Had my lamented friend (Lord G. Bentick) been spared to us, he would have introduced to the notice of Parliament this year a measure that I believe would have done more for Ireland than all the measures ever introduced by ministers for the last half-century—more comprehensive, more beneficial even than that great measure which unfortunately he did not carry. But it is useless to attempt to assist Ireland unless Irish members will throw aside their party feelings, and remember their interest in the land, without which they cannot much longer stand. Nothing can be more fatal to them, nothing more injurious to the future fortunes and welfare of their country, than their not combining with the landed interest of England to maintain the interests of the mutually oppressed properties.

Sir, I have endeavoured to place before the House—I trust in a fair, and I am sure in not an intemperate, spirit—the views and suggestions of those who complain of the grievances which I have alleged in the resolutions I have placed upon the table. The complainants are those various classes that, combined and united, form what is called in popular language ‘the landed interest:’ a portion of this nation which, whether we look at their property or their numbers, or the weight and influence which necessarily result from their social position and their interesting occupation, may still be accounted the most considerable order in our society.

It would be disingenuous, Sir, if in this discussion I attempted to conceal that the landed interest do not merely complain of the grievances alleged in these resolutions; they complain also of a great injury which they deem they have received from the hands of this House. It is not my intention now to enter into a consideration of the policy or the impolicy of those great measures which you passed three years ago—which you passed, and which they deplore. But it is my duty to represent to you that, dull or indifferent as you sometimes may have chosen to picture them, they have not been unmindful of what has happened in this country of late years, of much that has been done, and much that has been said in this House. They have witnessed the rise and development in this country of new properties, of new species of influence; and they have witnessed them without jealousy, because it is part of their economical creed that prosperity depends upon the union of classes. They have witnessed without any hostile feeling the right and rightful representation of those new interests and properties in this House since its reconstruction. But though they have observed these great incidents with no other feeling than such as becomes a manly mind, it is but right you should understand that it is not without emotion they have observed that the whole course of your legislation for years has been to invest those new properties and interests with privileges, and simultaneously to deprive them of theirs.

I said there was much that they had passed unobserved and unheeded in this House—much that has been said, and much that has been done. They have not forgotten that they have been spoken of in terms of contempt by ministers of State—ay, even by a son of one of their greatest houses: a house that always loves the land, and that the land still loves. They have not forgotten that they have been held up to public odium and reprobation by triumphant demagogues. They have not forgotten that their noble industry, which in the old days was considered the invention of gods and the occupation of heroes, has been stigmatised and denounced as an incubus upon English enterprise. They have not forgotten that even the very empire that was created by the valour and the devotion of their fathers

has been held up to public hatred, as a cumbersome and ensanguined machinery, only devised to pamper the luxury and feed the rapacity of our territorial houses. The fact is, Sir, these things are hard to digest. They are not pleasant to the humble—they are intolerable to the justly proud. These are things which change the heart and even the blood of nations; and whether you think their feeling is founded on justice, or whether you deem it baseless, I tell you and every member of this House, every good and wise man must feel, that nothing is more to be deprecated, nothing more dangerous, than that considerable classes of the country should deem that they are treated unfairly by the Legislature. Sir, the spirit of the landed interest is deeply wounded. Whether they have foundation for this feeling or not, it is one which I would recommend any minister not to treat with contempt.

I fancy, Sir, it has been somewhat too long the practice to believe that you might conduct yourselves toward the landed interest with impunity. It was even a proverb with Sir Robert Walpole that the landed interest might be fleeced at pleasure; and I observe at no time has that interest been more negligently treated than when demagogues are denouncing it as an oligarchical usurpation. But this may be dangerous play if you are outraging justice. You think you may trust their proverbial loyalty. Trust their loyalty, but do not abuse it. I dare say it may be said of them, as it was said 3,000 years ago, in the most precious legacy of political science that has descended to us—I dare say it may also be said of them that the agricultural class is the least given to sedition. I doubt not that it is as true of the Englishman of the plain and of the dale as it was of the Greek of the isle and of the continent; but it would be just as well if you recollected that the fathers of these men were the founders of your liberties; and that, before this time, their ancestors have bled for justice. Rely upon it that the blood of these men who refused to pay ship-money is not to be trifled with. Their conduct to you has exhibited no hostile feeling, notwithstanding the political changes that have abounded of late years, and all apparently to a diminution of their power. They have inscribed a homely sentence on their

rural banners; but it is one which, if I mistake not, is already again touching the heart and convincing the reason of England—‘Live, and let live.’ You have adopted a different motto—you, the leading spirits on the benches I see before me, have openly declared your opinion that if there were not an acre of land cultivated in England it would not be the worse for this country. You have all of you in open chorus announced your object to be the monopoly of the commerce of the universe, and to make this country the workshop of the world.

Your system and theirs are exactly contrary. They invite union. They believe that national prosperity can only be produced by the prosperity of all classes. You prefer to remain in isolated splendour and solitary magnificence. But, believe me, I speak not as your enemy when I say that it will be an exception to the principles which seem hitherto to have ruled society, if you can succeed in maintaining the success at which you aim without the possession of that permanence and stability which the territorial principle alone can afford. Although you may for a moment flourish after their destruction—although your ports may be filled with shipping, your factories smoke on every plain, and your forges flame in every city—I see no reason why you should form an exception to that which the page of history has mournfully recorded; that you, too, should not fade like the Tyrian dye, and moulder like the Venetian palaces. But united with the land, you will obtain the best and surest foundation upon which to build your enduring welfare; you will find in that interest a counsellor in all your troubles, in danger your undaunted champion, and in adversity your steady customer. It is to assist in producing this result, Sir, that I am about to place these resolutions in your hands. I wish to see the agriculture, the commerce, and the manufactures of England, not adversaries, but co-mates and partners—and rivals only in the ardour of their patriotism and in the activity of their public spirit.

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STATE OF THE NATION, July 2, 1849.<sup>1</sup>

[On the above date Mr. Disraeli moved for a select committee for inquiring into the state of the nation. After contrasting the position of trade, agriculture, and the revenue in 1849 with its condition at the beginning of 1846, and glancing likewise at the aspect of foreign affairs, he concluded as follows :—]

SIR, I have now attempted—but more imperfectly than I could desire—to draw the attention of this House to the state of the country in all its principal relations. The canvas is so wide that it has been to me almost impossible to do more than merely sketch the principal features. But I have endeavoured, without exaggeration, and relying upon documents the accuracy of which cannot and will not be impugned, to lay before the House a fair and impartial statement of our position.

I will not for one moment pretend that what I deem to be our calamitous condition is to be ascribed to any one particular cause. I am ready to admit that, in the complicated transactions of a great country like this, and in a period of time which in this age of rapid events cannot be considered a brief one, many conjunctures and casualties must occur which the prescience of no statesman could have foreseen, and some of which the power of no minister could remedy. I am not one of those who look upon the Irish famine as a Cabinet measure. But I am bound to say—taking a general, but I believe not an incomplete, view of the whole course of the Government, and of the events which have happened within the last three years—that I do recognise one predominant cause to which I attribute the greater part of our calamities : and that is our legislation.

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

Some three years or more ago, as it appears to me, we thought fit to change the principle upon which the economic system of this country had been previously based. Hitherto this country had been, as it were, divided into a hierarchy of industrial classes, each one of which was open to all, but in each of which every Englishman was taught to believe that he occupied a position better than the analogous position of individuals of his order in any other country in the world. For example, the British merchant was looked on as the most creditable, the wealthiest, and the most trustworthy merchant in the world; the English farmer ranked as the most skilful agriculturist—a fact proved by his obtaining a greater amount of produce from the soil than any farmer in Europe or America; while the English manufacturer was acknowledged as the most skilful and successful, without a rival in ingenuity and enterprise. So with the British sailor—the name was a proverb, and chivalry was confessed to have found a last resort in the breast of a British officer. It was the same in our learned professions. Our physicians and lawyers held higher positions than those in other countries. I have heard it stated that the superiority of those classes was obtained at the cost of the last class of the hierarchy; at the cost of the labouring population of the country. But although I have heard in this House something of the periodical sufferings of that class, as if every class had not its period of suffering; although I have heard in this House epochs referred to of great distress, as if the instances were not exceptional, I know of no great community existing since, I will say, the fall of the Roman Empire, where the working population have been, upon the whole, placed in so advantageous a position as the working classes of England. I speak not of their civil rights, which are superior to those which princes enjoy in other countries<sup>1</sup>—I speak simply of their material position. I say they have had a greater command over

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the necessaries of life than any population of equal size in any community of Europe. I maintain that for the last sixty years their progress has borne a due relation to the progress of all other classes. More than that, for the last twenty years the spirit of our laws, and, what is more important, the spirit of our society, has been to elevate their condition. Therefore, I must maintain that the position of the English working-man was superior to the position of the working-man of any other country. In this manner, in England society was based upon the aristocratic principle in its complete and most magnificent development. You set to work to change the basis upon which this society was established : you disdain to attempt the accomplishment of the best, and what you want to achieve is—the cheapest. But I have shown you that, considered only as an economical principle, the principle is fallacious—that its infallible consequence is to cause the impoverishment and embarrassment of the people, as proved by the dark records to which I have had occasion so much to refer. But the impoverishment of the people is not the only ill consequence which the new system may produce.

The wealth of England is not merely material wealth—it does not merely consist in the number of acres we have tilled and cultivated, nor in our havens filled with shipping, nor in our unrivalled factories, nor in the intrepid industry of our mines. Not these merely form the principal wealth of our country ; we have a more precious treasure : and that is the character of the people. That is what you have injured. In destroying what you call class legislation, you have destroyed that noble and indefatigable ambition which has been the source of all our greatness, of all our prosperity and all our power.

I know of nothing more remarkable in the present day than the general discontent which prevails, accompanied as it is on all sides by an avowed inability to suggest any remedy. The feature of the present day is depression and perplexity. That English spirit which was called out and supported by your old system seems to have departed from us. It was a system which taught men to aspire, and not to grovel. It was a

system that gave strength to the subject, and stability to the State; that made the people of this country undergo adversity and confront it with a higher courage than any other people; and that animated them, in the enjoyment of a prosperous fortune, with a higher degree of enterprise. I put it to any gentleman—I care not to what party he belongs, what his political opinions, or what his pursuits in life—if there be not now only one universal murmur—a murmur of suffering without hope. Well, the honourable and learned gentleman<sup>1</sup> seems to be of a different opinion, and doubtless he will with his usual ability favour us with his consolatory views. But, as far as I can judge, men in every place—in the golden saloon, and in the busy mart of industry; in the port, in the Exchange, by the loom, or by the plough, every man says, ‘I suffer, and I see no hope.’

I was reminded the other day when reading a passage in the works of the greatest Roman statesman, of the truth that the present is only the reproduction of the past. It would, perhaps, be pedantic in me to quote the passage to the House, who are well acquainted with it; but it is where Cicero tells Atticus, in the last years of that great epoch when he flourished, that a new disease had fallen upon the State; that the State is dying of a new disease; that men in all conditions joined in denouncing everything that was done; that they complained, grieved, openly lamented; that complaint was universal, but that no remedy was proposed by anyone; and he says that there is a general idea that resistance without some fatal struggle was impossible, although it were resistance against that which all disapproved; and that the only limit of concession appeared to be the death of the republic. I think the passage runs somewhat thus:—‘*Nunc quidem novo quodam morbo civitas moritur, et cum omnes ea quæ sunt acta improbent, querantur, doleant, aperteque loquantur et tam clare gemant, tamen medicina nulla affertur, neque resisti sine internecione posse arbitramur, nec finem cedendū videmus, præter exitium.*’

I know not what profit there may be in the study of history, what value in the sayings of wise men, or in the recorded experience of the past, if it be not to guide and instruct us in

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Roebuck.

the present. The honourable and learned member for Sheffield seemed by his observation to think that we share the lot of those who are suffering under that disease which Cicero describes as afflicting the commonwealth, and that we are not prepared to offer any remedy. He mistakes us. It is because I wish to offer a remedy that I have presumed to call upon the House of Commons to-day to exercise the highest privilege with which the constitution has invested it. It is because I wish to offer a remedy that I place in your hands, Sir, the resolution I now propose ; because I believe in my conscience that it is the best and surest means to save a suffering people and to sustain a falling country.

[Motion made, and question proposed—‘That this House do resolve itself into a committee of the whole House to take into consideration the state of the nation.’]

## STATE OF THE NATION, July 6, 1849.

[On July 6, Mr. Disraeli replied to the various criticisms to which his resolution had been subjected, more especially to Sir Robert Peel. But the division was not a very good one, only 151 members following him into the lobby against 296 on the other side.]

SIR, when I brought this motion, to take into consideration the state of the nation, before the notice of the House, I founded that part of the argument which may be called the economic portion on the most authentic and latest information which we had upon the condition of the people, and which had been afforded us by the officers of the Government. And now the noble lord (Lord J. Russell) who has just addressed you speaks in a depreciating tone of my quoting, as the basis of my argument, ‘some returns of no very recent date.’ Who could suppose that the noble lord was speaking of the last official Report of the President of the Poor Law Board, and which has only been placed within a few weeks on the table of the House by Her Majesty’s Government? That Report is the only authentic evidence to which we can refer; and if its date, carried up to Lady-day, 1848, be comparatively no very recent date, whose fault is it that we have not later information? Who placed this document on the table during the present session? It appears by that record—the last official record of the pauperism of the country—that the able-bodied paupers during the last three years had increased seventy-four per cent., and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to meet this statement, the accuracy of which no one has for a moment impugned, refers to certain letters which he has received from certain manufacturing districts, announcing that in those districts the severity of the pauper pressure has recently been mitigated. I thought that at the time a somewhat singular process for a



minister to have recourse to. Gentlemen must be aware that references to private correspondence on a subject of public and general interest gives such an opening to lax and unsatisfactory statements, that it is only under peculiar circumstances—limited usually to the locality which a member represents—that the right to introduce them in debate can be recognised.

Undoubtedly, ministers of the Crown have means of information not accessible to all, and sources of a more novel character than we can command; and with such means at his service, the right honourable gentleman, for example, has applied to the Commissioners of the Savings Banks as a test of the condition of the people; and he has furnished the house with one or two instances in this respect. Now, really, if it occurred to the right honourable gentleman to apply to the Commissioners of the Savings Banks for information, I am at a loss to understand why it had not also suggested itself to him to apply to the President of the Poor Law Board for the same object. If my information as to the state of pauperism, however authentic, is not of a date recent enough to satisfy Her Majesty's ministers, was it not their duty to furnish themselves with some more novel? If it existed, they had it at command; if it were not produced, the only inference could be that it was not unfavourable to my argument. No one doubted—I myself commenced by the admission—that since the last return of the Poor Law Board, there was, probably, some alleviation in the pauperism of our manufacturing districts: that is, since Lady-day, 1848. We should, indeed, be in a woeful position, if that were not the case. But since that period, that agricultural pressure has occurred which has produced that effect on the unions of the rural counties which my honourable friend the member for Kent detailed. With some alleviation in the manufacturing districts, and considerable aggravation in the agricultural, the fair inference is, that in the interval the general result has not been changed for the better. And if the Chancellor of the Exchequer chose to have recourse to other sources of information than those before the House, he should have been impartial in his researches; he should have favoured us with some information of the state of the rural districts, as well

as of the manufacturing. And, indeed, I have been expecting something of this sort from the President of the Poor Law Board. He is peculiarly qualified for taking part in this debate. He is a sort of double-barrelled gun upon the subject; he might have enlightened us, not only on the state of pauperism in general, but on that of the port of Hull in particular. But after a considerable lapse of time—after two days, unfortunately not spent in the discussion of this subject, and scarcely in a very profitable manner—up rises the First Minister of the Crown, and comes forward in a high statistical character—a character, however, in which, I may be permitted to say, he has been scarcely as eminent as some which his genius enables him to fill.

The noble lord comes forward with manuscript returns of the state of pauperism in England—returns of a more recent date, to use his own phrase, than any that a mere member of Parliament can refer to. And what do these returns amount in quantity to? They are the returns of eighty-seven unions; sixteen of which only are agricultural, or partially so, and they show a diminution of pauperism since the last official date. Why, there are six hundred and fifty-two unions in England; and a considerable portion of the country is not yet even formed into unions, though their condition is accessible to the President of the Poor Law Board. If the noble lord wished to establish a case by travelling out of the range of the official documents before the House, he was bound to pursue his investigation further and more widely. After all these official researches, the noble lord favours the House with a more recent return of the state of actually sixteen agricultural unions. Statistical inquiry has seldom produced a shorter harvest.

When the Chancellor of the Exchequer commenced his reply to me, the machinery at first seemed hardly to move rightly. He rose after some interval, and seemed to be looking for an antagonist. At last he found me. Where? At Drury Lane Theatre. His comments upon some speeches not made in this House have formed a considerable portion of his reply. Really if he wishes to answer speeches made at Drury Lane, he should himself appear upon those boards. Several distinguished characters on both sides of the House have figured there; and I

doubt not if the Chancellor of the Exchequer were to follow their example, and were properly advertised, he might draw a house. After having answered the speeches that were made at Drury Lane, the right honourable gentleman addressed himself to business, and proceeded with the argument which he had prepared in answer to my anticipated statement. But, unfortunately, my anticipated statement was not the one which I made. The theme of the right honourable gentleman was that this country was more prosperous in 1848 than in 1847. Well, generally progressive as I think the decline of the country, I can afford to make this concession to the Chancellor of the Exchequer: I admit that even at this moment we may be considered to be in a better condition than we were in 1847. The argument which I placed before the House was not founded on that year. I took the year 1845 as illustrative of the state of the country before certain great changes took place in your laws, and I contrasted that state with the state of the country at the present time, when we had had three years' experience of those great changes. I did not require the year 1847 for my argument, and had I required it, I am not sure that I should have referred to it.

I wish in debate not only to be fair, but courteous. Everyone has some subject which it is not pleasant to allude to, and which well-bred people carefully avoid. I was therefore not particularly anxious to go out of my way to remind the Government of the year 1847, when, principally under the advice of the right honourable gentleman, they ruined most of the bankers and merchants of the city of London. Why should I have done anything so gratuitously unkind? The noble lord, however, as if desperately resolved to encounter an inevitable difficulty, did observe that there was one topic which his right honourable colleague had not dwelt on—namely, the policy of the Government with respect to the maintenance of the Bank Charter; and therefore I may now just observe that, although I did myself omit that subject in the bill of indictment, it was not because I thought that, even in the year 1847, the conduct of Her Majesty's ministers in that particular was one which proffered a great claim to public confidence.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer then proceeded to notice an argument of mine, as to the comparative value of our exports, and, after a great many desultory observations, wound up his criticism by honestly and candidly admitting that he could not understand it; which was at least candid. The right honourable gentleman said that, as he had shown us that wages were not diminished, and as I myself had admitted that the raw material was higher in price, the inevitable inference was one which he could hardly suppose would be seriously maintained—namely, that manufacturers would manufacture without obtaining a profit. And he was loudly cheered by gentlemen around him, with that derisive cheer which would not only sustain the orator who speaks, but would wound the orator who has spoken. And yet, Sir, I remember the time, not very far distant, when manufacturer after manufacturer used to rise in this House, complaining of their condition; and when we referred to the exports as an indication of their possible prosperity, they used to tell us that for years they had been manufacturing without any profit whatever. We were then told that nothing was so deceptive as our exports; and when we reproached them with their prosperity they declared that our foreign trade in 1841 was even carried on at a loss. After this, the right honourable gentleman the Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered himself of a quantity of statistics. What point they were intended to establish, by what chain of ratiocination they were bound together, to what system of investigation they had been submitted before they were brought forward to illuminate our convictions, I am at a loss to understand. I can only compare the process with a scene that we have sometimes witnessed at a rural fair, where a conjurer will for three hours together draw out of his mouth a quantity of red tape. Late as the hour is, I must throw myself on the indulgence of the House, and in some degree avail myself of my privilege of reply. The House need not, I am sure, be reminded that this debate, important and expedient as it has been on all hands, has been, from circumstances over which I have no control, somewhat precipitated, and that I have consequently been deprived of the assistance of many gentlemen in this House who would have ably

supported in detail many points to which I was necessarily obliged only very cursorily to allude. I trust, therefore, I may be excused, if I touch for a few minutes on one speech, which dwelt very considerably on the observations which I made.

The right honourable gentleman the member for Tamworth, in rising to-night, announced to the House that to-night he was going to introduce a new plan of debating, as one more fair and satisfactory, I presume, than that which he has hitherto pursued—namely, to state many arguments, each separately, as nearly as he could, in the words in which it was conveyed, and then to give that which appeared to him to be the answer to it; and, having obtained apparently the sympathetic permission of the House to pursue this satisfactory system of discussion, the right honourable gentleman, instead of refuting my observations paragraph by paragraph, as we were promised, went off immediately to Drury Lane Theatre also. There, instead of replying to me, the right honourable gentleman entered into the glove trade, which I had never even mentioned; and he only escaped from this scene and this subject, not to refute me, but to indulge in one of his favourite criticisms on the dogmas of the honourable member for Birmingham, and the state of the trade of the town which he represents. At length, the right honourable gentleman condescended to remember his engagement, and attacked my heresies respecting exports. But my opinions, however heterodox, were not new, according to the right honourable gentleman—if I had only been in Parliament when Mr. Alderman Waithman was a member of it, I should have heard precisely the same opinions. Now, though I was not in the House with the worthy Alderman—who, by the by, was a distinguished Liberal—I think I am not quite unacquainted with the often-expressed opinions of Alderman Waithman on our foreign trade. The position of Alderman Waithman was this: he was in the habit of comparing the official and the declared or real value of our exports. He found the first, for example, was 130,000,000*l.*, and the real value only 50,000,000*l.* He measured the depreciation of the reward of British labour by the difference between the two sums; and anything more absurd was probably never promulgated in this House. Mr.

Alderman Waithman never took into his calculation the various circumstances which, for nearly two centuries (the date of our official values), had been gradually lessening the cost of production. But did I do this? What did I say? I said that between the two periods which I compared in my argument—namely, the years 1845 and 1848—our exports had fallen off 7,000,000*l.* in declared value, and, as I maintained, in consequence of your legislation, and that, although there had occurred, during the first four months of this year, what is called a ‘revival of trade,’ and our exports had rallied in amount, that amount had been obtained by English workmen submitting to a depreciation of price greater even than the excess of exports during the period. I was careful to remind the House, moreover, that this depreciation could not be produced by any legitimate reductions in the cost of production, because the raw material was absolutely higher in the first four months of 1848 than it was during the first four months of 1849. The only inference that can be drawn is, that the English artisan obtains his foreign products under the new system by giving more of his labour in exchange than heretofore. So much for the similarity between my opinions and those of Alderman Waithman.

The right honourable gentleman then said that I complained that my argument in favour of commercial reciprocity, often urged, had never been fairly met; and the right honourable gentleman, as far as he was concerned, attributed the circumstance to the lateness of the hour at which he generally spoke on the abstruse character of the subject to be treated under such circumstances. If the right honourable gentleman has felt the lateness of the hour a difficulty in treating the subject, what must be my situation, rising to reply to him at two o’clock in the morning? Nevertheless, I trust to the generosity of the House to permit me not to leave the observations of the right honourable gentleman on this head altogether unanswered. The right honourable gentleman asks me whether I would encounter the hostile tariff of America by a counter-vailing duty on raw cotton, to the injury of our own manufactures? The right honourable gentleman will pardon me if I

observe that he scarcely appears to have condescended to have made himself acquainted with the principles of the reciprocity system. The reciprocity system does not countenance countervailing duties on raw materials. The fallacy of the right honourable gentleman on this head appears to me his confounding raw materials and provisions. A countervailing duty on the raw material—American cotton, for instance—would place the foreign manufacturer who did not pay that duty in a superior position to the English manufacturer. Therefore, the reciprocity system, the object of which is to maintain the efficiency of British labour, does not authorise a countervailing duty on raw materials imported for reproduction; but countervailing duties on corn and provisions come under quite a different head. A duty on the raw material renders British labour less efficient; a duty on corn, on the contrary, would protect British labour, and maintain its exchangeable value. And it has always appeared to me, Sir, a very great mistake in the Manchester school that, when they succeeded in obtaining a repeal of the duty on cotton, they did not advocate a duty on corn, because, by giving a premium to the production of corn in the United States, they have restricted their supply of the raw material of their manufacture.

The right honourable gentleman seems very indignant with the Poor Law Commissioners for publishing, in their annual report, a table which shews that during seven years when the price of wheat was highest a less sum by 200,000*l.* was expended in support of pauperism than in other seven years when the price of wheat was lowest. The right honourable gentleman does not, however, dispute the fact. He only meets the inference drawn from it by a suggestion that the years of high and low prices are not continuous years, and that in a year of low prices following a year of high prices the country may suffer from the preceding pressure. But this argument will hardly help the right honourable gentleman out of the difficulty; for the average price of the whole fourteen years is not excessive. It is only 56*s.* The right honourable gentleman then, not satisfied with finding fault with the Poor Law Commissioners for publishing the official facts that came before

them, fell foul of a Tithe Commissioner—no less a person than Professor Jones—whose work I had quoted to illustrate the extent and influence of what is called the home market.

Professor Jones lays down that in unremunerative times, periods of pressure, the farmers will reduce their cost of production 25 per cent., and that this reduction of the cost of production in due time exercises a relative degree of influence on their amount of produce; and it is this withdrawal of 25 per cent. of their exchangeable surplus that occasions the distress caused by a depressed home market. The right honourable gentleman says that he is surprised that Professor Jones should be an advocate of high prices. Professor Jones gave no opinion on high or low prices. He stated a certain economical law, the consequences of which it is in vain to shut our eyes to, and the accuracy of which no one will venture to impugn. My right honourable friend the member for Stamford (Mr. Herries) was the individual who fell under the right honourable gentleman's criticism, in consequence of a motion of which the member for Stamford had given notice, and of an opinion which he had expressed in this debate; as if that motion had ought to do with the question which we are now discussing. Now, Sir, I will give the reasons for my right honourable friend giving notice of that motion. It was only this day, when my right honourable friend examined the balance sheet of the Treasury, that he felt that no time should be lost in bringing our financial state before the consideration of the House, in order that the country might see that there were yet some means of ascertaining the fatal crisis which was approaching, and that the dividends might be secured to the public creditor.

It was altogether a financial movement. No one even dreamed of proposing a 5s. duty as a protection to native industry. As the right honourable gentleman the member for Tamworth says, that would indeed be a paltry thing. And yet, paltry as it may now appear, there was a time when a moderate fixed duty on corn was not considered altogether a paltry subject, but one on which a few years back the most eminent men in the country felt themselves justified to agitate England to its centre. Paltry as it is, it was a question which destroyed the Govern-



ment of the noble lord and returned upon the shoulders of the people of England a body of gentlemen who might have been governing the country at the present moment had they not suddenly discovered that the object for which they struggled, and the end they laboured to achieve, was, instead of a patriotic, after all only a paltry one. And truly when the noble lord the First Minister, who is proud of his supporters on this side, taunts us with so much acerbity, I think he might just recollect by whose advice and under whose influence we refused to accept that settlement of a question which perhaps might have prevented much of the evil experienced by the country at the present moment. And here I must say, with all respect to the right honourable baronet, that there is something in his manner<sup>1</sup> when he addresses on those subjects his former companions which I will not say is annoying, but rather I would style somewhat astonishing. One would almost imagine, from the tone of the right honourable gentleman, that he had never, for a moment, held other opinions on this subject; that he had never entertained a doubt upon it; that he had been born an infant Hercules, cradled in political economy, and only created to strangle the twin serpents of protection and monopoly. He speaks with a sneer of those who think that the principle of buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest market is a new principle invented by the Manchester school. I have a right to use that phrase, for I gave them that name. I gave it them with all respect; I thought it a homage due to their deleterious, but not unprincipled, doctrines.

But the honourable baronet says we are all in error in assuming this principle to be a new one, and he opens a book and shows an honourable member the celebrated petition of the merchants of London, and refers to this document and to the names of Adam Smith, Mr. Say, and David Hume, as authorities, both for the principle and the phrase. The right honourable gentleman mistakes us. We admit fully the comparative antiquity of the dogma; what surprises us is, not the comparative antiquity of the dogma, but the recent conversion of the

<sup>1</sup> Herein lay the secret of the bitterness with which the Protectionist party regarded their late leader.

dogmatist. The right honourable gentleman should view one's errors at least with charity. He is not exactly the individual who *ex cathedra* should lecture us on the principles of political economy. He might at least, when he denounces our opinions, suppose that in their profession we may perhaps be supported by that strength of conviction which for nearly forty years sustained him in those economical errors of which he was the learned and powerful professor. The right honourable gentleman always speaks of protection as if he had a personal feeling against it. He preaches a crusade against the system of commercial reciprocity. But this is a system which has been upheld by the opinions and illustrated by the writings of men of very great talent in this country, and not connected with our party politics or passions. Men of great scientific research have investigated and illustrated it: and I believe that it will require more time and discussion than it has yet received in this House before it can be thrown into that limbo of stale opinions in which the right honourable gentleman has found it convenient to deposit so many of his former convictions. Upon a fair occasion, and not two hours after midnight, I shall be happy to meet the right honourable gentleman, or any other member, in calm discussion on the subject. I must repeat, however, the opinions which I expressed on the first night of this debate, that I believe the judicious imposition of countervailing duties will produce abundance and not scarcity, cheapness and not dearness.

I hope the House will excuse me if for one moment I am unwilling to quit the field to which I have been challenged by the right honourable gentleman; but I must, even at the risk of wearying the House, refer to the illustration drawn from the prohibitory tariff of Russia, and our consequent commerce with South America. A countervailing duty on the Russian tariff would check the demand for Russian produce; the necessary consequence of this would be a fall in the value of that produce in the Russian markets. So far, therefore, the effect of a countervailing duty would be to produce diminished price. The fall in the Russian markets would equal the countervailing duty until in time the English consumer would be enabled to pur-

chase the same quantity of Russian produce at the same cost as before. Here, then, the ultimate effect would be neither dearness nor scarceness. But how would the countervailing duty act on our transactions with the Brazils? The fall in Russian produce would enable our merchants to buy the quantity they required with a less amount of sugar and coffee than before. But how would that diminish our markets in the Brazils? England would either send out the same quantity of manufactured goods to that quarter for the same amount of tropical products and retain the portion no longer required by Russia for her own use, or she would send a less quantity of her goods to purchase the less quantity of tropical produce with which she could now purchase the same quantity of Russian produce as before, and thus obtain a twofold advantage, an enhancement of her own manufactures in the South American market from their diminished supply, while the difference would be retained for her own use, or for exchange for the commodities of other countries. In every way the application of the principle of reciprocity would produce its intended effect, the enhancement of the value and efficiency of British labour.

But why these attempts to narrow the question before us to a mere commercial issue? It is nothing of the kind. The unsatisfactory state of our commerce is but one count in the indictment which has been proffered to the consideration of the House. It is not upon that one point merely, or principally, that you have to decide to-night. It may be very convenient for those who, month after month—I may say, year after year—have been murmuring opposition to a Government which they have not the courage manfully to oppose; it may be very convenient for those who go whispering about in corners that our colonial empire is in danger; that our foreign relations are mismanaged, it may be very convenient for such as those now to get up and proclaim that the only question at issue is a commercial question. It is no such thing. The noble lord at the head of the Government put it fairly. It is a vote of confidence in a Government which has now been three years in power, and whose policy, in every branch, has produced certain results. It is a vote of confidence in an empty and exhausted exchequer.

It is a vote of confidence in an endangered colonial empire. It is a vote of confidence in Danish blockades and Sicilian insurrections. It is a vote of confidence in a prostrate and betrayed agriculture. It is a vote of confidence in Irish desolation. Vote for these objects ; vote your confidence in the Government in which you do not confide ; but if you give them your votes, at least in future have the decency to cease your accusations, and silence your complaints.

AGRICULTURAL DISTRESS, February 19, 1850.<sup>1</sup>

[In pursuit of the object which he had set before himself, Mr. Disraeli at the beginning of the session of 1850 introduced another set of Resolutions<sup>2</sup> on the subject of agricultural distress, when he reduced the Government majority to 21—the Ayes being 252, the Noes only 273. Above all he secured the co-operation of Mr. Gladstone.]

**M**R. DISRAELI: Sir, I have to present a petition from 200 owners and occupiers of land, who recently met at Great Marlow, representing the unprecedented depression of all classes connected with the land, begging the House to remedy their sufferings by placing them, firstly, on an equality, in point of taxation, with their fellow-subjects; and secondly, in their own market, with the foreigners. I have also a petition from the Buckinghamshire Society for the Relief of Real Property, signed by nearly 1,000 members; but having perceived an informality, I am prevented presenting it.

Mr. Speaker, the depression among the classes connected with agriculture, referred to by the petitioners whose prayer I have just now placed upon the table continues. Since the meeting of Parliament, when that depression received no sympathy from Her Majesty's Government—I may say, no recognition—it has become even darker and more lowering. The 300,000,000*l.* of capital invested in the cultivation of the soil yields no profit to the cultivators of the soil. The value of the fee itself is deteriorated; and that factitious employment of the labouring population in the rural districts, which to the honour of the country has taken place, necessarily and naturally diminishes daily. Since these topics were last adverted to in the

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

<sup>2</sup> The Resolutions, three in number, will be found in the speech, pp. 273-275.

House, the Report of the Poor Law Board, to which the Minister on that occasion confidentially referred, has been placed in the hands of members, and we have there seen the data upon which the Government then founded their argument.

I am bound to say that from almost the commencement of this year I have myself received—and I believe I only represent the position of every gentleman immediately connected with agricultural constituencies—I have received reports from considerable unions in the country, which convey a different result from that which is accurately reported in the document to which I have referred. But the House will remember that the date of the aggregate of facts which was thus presented to our notice was only the first day of this year. It is since that time that that employment which I have ventured to describe as fictitious has, in my opinion, greatly diminished in the agricultural districts of the United Kingdom. It was, indeed, with reference to this point, my intention to have moved in this House for a return, similar to that which we are in possession of, up to February 1st; but upon inquiry, it was represented to me that such a return, if consented to, would entail upon a branch of the administration, that has already greatly exerted itself in order to afford the most recent and authentic information to the House and the country, exertions so enormous that I felt bound to relinquish my purpose. And, indeed, although I wish the office had fallen upon a member of greater influence in the House than myself, I would venture to make a remark upon the general conduct of that branch of the administration.

For so many years the central management of the poor-laws has excited in this House so much controversy—and, indeed, I may say, so much odium—that I think it must be a satisfaction to the House, to the Government, and to the country, to contrast the position which that branch of the administration now occupies with reference to public opinion, with what it did three years ago. I have no wish to enter on this occasion into any invidious comparison, or attempt to investigate the causes which have produced a very different result, but the Government must be repaid for the concession to opinion which they wisely made and which they wisely

carried into effect with respect to that department when they observe that a branch of the administration so intimately connected with the condition of the great body of the people, should be conducted, as I believe it now to be, in a manner which entitles it to public confidence. But we have to-night to inquire what is the best course to remove if possible, certainly to mitigate, that unprecedented depression to which the petitioners have referred. Upon this side of the House we believe that that depression has been occasioned by recent legislative enactments, by the recent repeal of the laws which regulated the importation of foreign agricultural produce. We believe that the surest course, the most safe, the most efficacious, the course which in the long run would be most advantageous to the community and most popular with the community, would be the re-establishment of laws regulating the importation of that foreign produce. And that being our conviction, we may be taunted, as we have already been taunted, with the circumstance that we shrink from maintaining our conviction by argument in this House.

The taunt is one easy to make, and it is not one very hard to bear. Speaking for those gentlemen with whom I have the honour to act, I can say that we do not in any way shrink from an argument upon that subject. We have seen nothing at all which in our opinion confutes the conclusions which in good report and evil report we have attempted to advocate in this House with regard to that great subject. We still believe that the principles upon which you have constructed your commercial code are fallacious. We still believe that the time will come when you yourselves will acknowledge the truth of that assertion. But, although I am myself of opinion that discussion is the soul of this House, and, indeed, of this free country; though I believe that there are occasions when discussion, and mere discussion, may be the highest duty and the most sovereign policy; still I must express my opinion that, as a general rule, it is not advantageous that this House should become a mere debating society, and that, generally speaking, discussion should not be originated here unless connected with some practical object of immediate attainment.

Now, I will speak with perfect frankness upon this point, and I do not speak only for myself. After the divisions that occurred on the Address in both Houses of Parliament, we were of opinion that only one conclusion could be drawn from those facts; and though in neither House was the division called upon the merits of that industrial system which is popularly known by the name of 'protection,' still we could not shut our eyes to the practical conclusion that it was the opinion of a large majority in both Houses of Parliament not to disturb at present the settlement which this country has recently arrived at in that respect. Under these circumstances, representing a great body of the people who are suffering, in our and their opinion, by those changes in the law; having arrived at a conviction that no abrogation of recent legislation could be obtained at present from the present Parliament, it became our duty to consider what course might be taken which, without controverting the conviction of the majority of the House, might at least be, as far as these misfortunes were concerned, of a remedial character.

Since this great controversy first commenced in this House, I have always, assuming that those laws which regulated the industry of the country might be repealed, seen looming in the distance a great alternative, to which I have been surprised that our most eminent statesmen have shut their eyes. I have always felt, if we thought fit to repeal those laws, and especially the laws which referred to the agricultural industry of this country, that the cultivators of the soil, that all classes connected with the cultivation of the soil, would offer this alternative to the Government:—'If you deprive us of that system of legislation under which for so long a period, with various modifications, we have enjoyed our property or pursued our industry, we shall ask this of you in the name of justice, that you should at least adapt our position to the altered circumstances in which you have placed us, and that you should revise the system of taxation that prevails in this country, with reference to its more equal and just distribution.'

I do not think that the claims of the classes connected with the soil can be placed before the House more neatly or



more concisely than in the petition which I presented to it to-day. The classes connected with the soil demand of the Government of this country two things: first, that they should be placed upon an equality with their fellow-subjects; and, secondly, that they should be placed in their own market upon an equality with the foreigner. They refer, in the first instance, to that enormous system of peculiar taxation from which the majority of this country are exempt, and which they have borne; they refer, in the second place, to those fiscal restrictions which, when you have placed them in direct competition with the foreigner, prevent them from exerting their utmost energies, and freely availing themselves of their complete resources. Now, it appears to me that these are claims logically expressed, and founded on severe justice; and if those who hurried on—as I believe, unhappily hurried on—the repeal of the laws which regulated the importation of foreign agricultural produce, did not at the time sufficiently and completely consider the consequences of their course—if they had not well weighed what must be the inevitable result of the new system which they have sought to establish—much as I regret the want of foresight in men so eminent; great and even perilous as may be the consequences of that inattention upon their part, I cannot, as the representative of an agricultural constituency, refrain from doing my duty to those who sent me here; and in the House of Commons where there may be a majority of economists, I cannot think I am acting wrong if, notwithstanding their economical convictions, I have still confidence in the justice of Englishmen.

Sir, my business to-night is to touch only partially one portion of the great theme which will, I believe, for a considerable time amply occupy the attention of Parliament, and before I advert more specifically to that portion, and to the measure which, with reference to it, I, with unaffected humility, shall presume to propose for the consideration of the House, I shall make one or two observations on the opinions that have been often expressed of late with respect to the nature of that taxation to which I am about particularly to call your attention. We are all well aware that recently, when that portion of our taxation popularly known as Rates, has been brought under the

notice of Parliament, considerable controversy has occurred with reference to the classes on which the weight and burden of these imposts fall. Some honourable gentlemen have informed us that the proprietor of the soil alone paid them; others have maintained that they were paid by the occupier, and they have advocated their repeal because the cultivator of the soil would be benefited by that repeal. But time, which generally brings with it truth, has removed in a great measure the difficulties connected with this question.

The honourable member for Montrose,<sup>1</sup> who, in the first year I took the liberty of making a motion on this subject, moved an amendment declaring proprietors alone paid rates, last year was the father, as he is this year the godfather, of a new representative system, which he is about to introduce throughout the country, in order that the occupiers, whom he now maintains to be the real payers of the rates, should exercise a control over the funds which they mainly furnish. Appealing, therefore, to the legislative proposition of last Wednesday on this subject, I might fairly assume that there was no longer any difference of opinion between honourable gentlemen opposite and myself as to the incidence of this class of taxation. But I am not willing to rest my argument on so narrow a basis, or to offer the proposition it is my duty to lay before you on so partial an admission. I think, Sir, the time has come when we must view this question a little more profoundly. As long as you passed laws in this House the tendency of which, according to your own opinion, was, in your own language, to raise rents, you had, perhaps, even if that opinion were fallacious, a right to analyse the relative interests of the owner and of the occupier of the soil. But the moment you swept those laws from off your statute-book; the moment you resolved that the land of England should enter into free competition with all the soils of all the kingdoms of the globe, I think you were stopped from considering the relative interests of occupiers and owners, and that instead of busying yourselves with the interests of landlord and tenant, you had from that time to deal only with the interests of the land.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Hume.

There have been and still are, I may say, two opinions prevalent in this House, or at least in this country, on the subject of that species of property which we popularly term 'land.' There are those who hold that there is a distinction between land and all other species of property. There are those who hold that distinction absolutely and under all circumstances. There are, Sir, many who hold it with reference to the land of England as a great political principle, which an Englishman ought not to relinquish. Considering that all our institutions spring from the land—considering that the Throne, that the estates of the realm, that the great scheme of our judicial institutions, the inheritance of the poor, the sacred spires, as it were, of our ecclesiastical establishment, all have their origin in the same source; considering that, in fact, we have a territorial constitution, they always have been of opinion that it was the first duty of a British statesman to sustain the industry, the property, and the influence of our territorial population. It is for this reason they have ever been of opinion—an opinion strictly constitutional—that we should, in all our legislation which refers to or regulates the distribution of power, consult the preponderance of the landed interest. They thought so because they considered that preponderance the best security for order and liberty, and, in addition, the best security for that political stability which is a still rarer quality in the history of nations than order and freedom. These are opinions which I know are considered somewhat old-fashioned in the House of Commons, but which, I believe, have not yet forfeited their hold on the great majority of the people; and I humbly venture to share in and adhere to them.

There is another class of opinions—not so popular or so prevalent out of the House, but in the House maintained with great vigour and ability—with respect to land. The gentlemen who represent this opinion hold that there is no difference whatever between the land even of England and any other species of property. They maintain that all those considerations to which I have referred, respecting the maintenance of order, of liberty, and of the stability of States are mere superstitions; that the land is to be considered, to use a phrase

which the honourable member for the West Riding<sup>1</sup> very erroneously imputed to me, as raw material, which we ought not to regard as endowed necessarily with any peculiar quality whatever. I have never admitted, nor do I now in any way admit, the truth of this opinion, but I accept it in argument, for nothing, I think, is more convenient in discussion than to draw your conclusions, if possible, from the admissions of your opponents; and for that reason alone, having heard it in this House from persons of great authority, and finding similar opinions promulgated by literary organs out of doors of great ability, I said, if the land indeed were a raw material, we claimed for it the application of the same principle you extend to all other raw materials. To this remark I am bound to say, Sir, I have not yet received a satisfactory answer; great subsequent silence on this subject in the House; out of the House among those organs of which I have spoken, similar silence also for a time; then a denial that the land was a raw material, or assertions that if it be so, it is a raw material peculiar from all others, because it produces a quality called 'rent.'

Now, what I want to impress upon the House is this—that from the moment you forced the land of England into competition with the land of all the world, you have no business to inquire into that quality called 'rent.' According to our opinion, and to the opinion of many of the most influential men opposed to the agricultural policy we would recommend, the consequence of your recent laws will be to throw a great quantity of land out of cultivation. The difference between us on this head is only one of degree. According to all, there is one class of land which is certainly doomed to sterility. Well, what I wish to urge on the House is this—that the amount of this peculiar taxation, styled local taxation, may make the exact margin which permits that land to be cultivated, or dooms it to a barren existence. It is on these grounds I maintain that you have no right now to consider what may be the effect of your legislation on rent. All you have to do with regard to the land is to act with justice and consistently with those economical principles which are the foundation of your

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Cobden.

commercial code. I say the House has no longer any right to speculate on the amount and nature of rent. It is a subject which, owing to your recent legislation, is swept from your consideration. And, Sir, nothing astonishes me more than the tone assumed in this House on this subject.

If I did not know I was addressing a society which must necessarily be a society of gentlemen, on the whole the ablest and best informed in the country, I should sometimes suppose that in this House existed some of those prejudices which are to be found elsewhere with respect to the character of landed proprietors. On another occasion, when a similar subject was under discussion, I ventured to request that the House would consider the elements composing that class, because certainly the tone taken in debate, when speaking of them, is one which applies only to a limited, luxurious, indolent and aristocratic class—a class whose rights, however, if they should be thus justly described, should, I conceive, be treated in accordance with the principles of justice. But it is well to consider if this prevalent character of the proprietors of the soil is a just one. I took occasion recently to mention that, following the researches and conclusions of the most eminent writers on this subject, I calculated the number of landed proprietors of the United Kingdom as probably about 250,000. Now, I ask the House to consider what is the aristocratic element of this numerous and important class. You cannot perhaps take any better mode to ascertain a fact of so much importance than the following:—Calculate the number of manorial estates. It is a subject on which you will probably find no return ready to your hand; but we all know that in the United Kingdom generally speaking, every parish is a manor, though every manor is not a parish. Allowing, then, one-fourth for manorial estates not parochial, which I have every reason to believe is a liberal allowance, we may assume that there are 20,000 manorial estates. These form the aristocratic element; these are the estates of that squirearchy of whom we hear so much, and whose personal interests, we are told, are alone considered when we legislate for the land. Well, you find that they are thus exactly one-twelfth of the class of landed proprietors. But divide the

complete rental of the United Kingdom, according to the returns, by the number of these proprietors; take the rental at 60,000,000*l.* a year, and you will find that you have a body of proprietors at 240*l.* a year each. But as we all know there are many who have much more, it follows that there must be a great number who have much less. Yet this is the class who are always painted to the passions of the community as a luxurious, limited, privileged and aristocratic class, though they are, on the contrary, the most thrifty, the most industrious, the most hard-living class as a whole that probably exists in the United Kingdom.

I maintain, then, that with respect to this class you should legislate according to justice, and to the principles you are perpetually parading; that no inquiry respecting the incidence of taxation, as to whether it falls on the owner or the occupier, is necessary for you in order to decide what you should do; that you should henceforth act in accordance with the principles of political justice, and with what you consider economic truth; that in taking the course which justice and policy alike recommend you are not to regard the owner or the occupier, but to consider whether you are doing justice to that most important interest, the land of England; whether the land which you have thrown into competition with all the soils of all the countries of the world can be worked in a remunerative manner, and not whether the profit goes to the landed proprietor or to the occupying tenant. Now, Sir, with these opinions I proceed to call the attention of the House to the first part of the important subject to which I have adverted—namely, the relations of the agricultural interest in all its classes to the local taxation of the country.

I have on a former occasion taken an opportunity of calling your attention to the general subject of local taxation in England. The facts I then placed before you were not controverted at the time, nor have they since been disputed; and, indeed, many gentlemen of official authority who took part in that debate acknowledged their accuracy. On that occasion I stated that the property connected with the soil of England, independently of contributing to the general revenue, con-

tributed to another revenue in England alone to the amount of 12,000,000*l.* sterling, and that all the objects for which this second revenue was raised were objects of general interest and national concern. I then included the land-tax in the aggregate amount. I assumed the land-tax to be virtually two millions per annum, which was admitted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as it must be by anyone who had given attention to the subject; but I acknowledged that though it was a tax on the land, and locally raised, there was a difference between it and other sources of local taxation, because it was paid into the imperial exchequer. I shall not dwell on this point on the present occasion, because it does not immediately concern us. The land-tax is only another instance how the land of England has been at all times made to pay more into the exchequer than it ought, since the law entailing the land-tax was originally a law which equally applied to all other species of property. It would not be difficult, indeed, to prove that since its introduction more than 100,000,000*l.* have been paid by the land under the machinery of the land-tax than the land ought to have contributed. But taking the annual local taxation of the United Kingdom, setting aside the land-tax, at 14,000,000*l.*, I only refer to the fact that the House should bear in mind the general amount of this peculiar revenue, so remarkably raised, and which has been sustained with such a spirit of endurance for so long a period, and that it may more justly consider the peculiar branch of taxation to which I am now about to call its attention more specifically. That branch of the local taxation of the United Kingdom is the poor-rates.

I see that the honourable member for Shetland and the Orkneys<sup>1</sup> has moved an amendment on my motion to-night, to which I shall for a moment advert. The honourable gentleman has moved 'For the appointment of a Select Committee to inquire into the effects of the laws for levying duties on the importation of corn and other agricultural produce from the year 1815 to 1848, both inclusive; also into the relative amounts of taxation, local and general, which have been levied during the same period on agricultural and other property and incomes.'

<sup>1</sup> Mr. A. Anderson.

Now, that appears to me to be a very sensible motion ; and if the honourable gentleman had had more experience than he possesses of the House, I think he would have moved it as an unopposed return, because I can assure him all the information he desires on these important subjects can be obtained upstairs, and if he only examined the reports of committees of this House and of the House of Lords, he would find every particular so amply furnished that it would not have been necessary to move this amendment. Indeed, I have been furnished by a gentleman of authority with a digest of all the information the honourable member requires. It ranges, not merely from 1815, but from 1800 to 1845 ; and in reference to it the honourable member will find that landed property in that period has paid 581,000,000*l.* to the State, as compared with 159,000,000*l.* paid by other real property. Now, I have no wish to touch on the comparative tributes by the different classes of real property. I think it unjust to these classes that they should contribute to a peculiar taxation. All this information and much more that refers to the subject is not of the slightest use to me, and I shall not avail myself of it ; but as I am of opinion that in the intercourse of social life an interchange of Parliamentary courtesies is not the least agreeable, I have brought the digest down to the House in order that the honourable member may use it in his speech. If he makes good use of it, his speech will be one unrivalled for statistical research, and the only misfortune will be that his facts and figures will entirely refute all his foregone conclusions.

I venture now, Sir, to call the attention of the House to the nature of a poor-law. I have before this taken the liberty of saying that a poor-law was a law which might be vindicated on two principles—either as a matter of police or as a matter of social duty. If you regard it as a matter of police, if it be the interest of society that, by providing for those in want, society should be secure from the consequences of violence and rapine, it is clearly the interest of all, and it should be supported by all. But if you take the higher motive, and consider the maintenance of the poor, as we do in England, a social duty, then it is the duty of all, according to their means ; and there-



fore it ought not to be a tax charged on one kind of property. Everyone knows, however, that it is a tax charged on one kind of property. I will not enter into any wearisome inquiry to ascertain the relative amount of property subject to it, and the amount of property privileged and exempted from it. Never mind whether it is one-fourth or whether it is one-third of the income of the country; never mind whether 80,000,000*l.* or 60,000,000*l.* bear the charge which 240,000,000*l.* ought to bear; the great fact remains, that the vast majority of the property of the country does not fulfil the social duty which all acknowledge. Now, there are, Sir, I know, very grave objections to remedial measures in this behalf, and, indeed, it is not possible to conceive how such flagrant injustice could have flourished so long; were not the difficulty in removing it considerable. In the first place, every one is afraid of interfering with or disturbing that happy system of local government of which we have so much reason to be proud, and which has been the source of so much public happiness.

I never happen to speak on this subject to any person of great property not connected with the land but I find him eloquent on the blessings of that system. Ask any fortunate possessor of 30,000*l.* or 40,000*l.* per annum in the sweet simplicity of the Three per Cents. if he does not think he ought to contribute proportionately to the relief of the poor, and he will tell you that abstractedly he admits the justice of it, but fears lest in doing so he might endanger our happy system of self-government. I frankly admit I should myself be unwilling to support any proposition which could endanger that system; but I cannot admit the solution of the problem is impossible that shall reconcile local management with imperial taxation, though I confess that in attempting to solve it the law of settlement must be determined for ever. But there is another objection against offering any relief as to the present distribution of the taxes levied under the poor-law, and it is rather a popular objection also. It is said, and has been recently repeated, with no novelty of assertion, but with some authority, that land in the country has been inherited or otherwise acquired subject to this charge. That, I observe, is a remark which always tells,

and which perplexes if it does not convince, but with respect to which there is one simple but sufficient observation—it is not true. In the first place, it clearly is not true as regards Ireland. The land of that country was not inherited or acquired subject to poor-rates. It is clear, again, it is not true with regard to another of Her Majesty's kingdoms. The land of Scotland was not inherited or acquired subject to poor-rates. But neither is it true with respect to very considerable portions of the land of England. The House would be surprised, if they investigated this topic, at the number of very considerable estates, and of some less important but not less interesting tenures—yeoman estates—which were not originally subject to this charge.

I had intended giving some of the names of those properties, but refrain from doing so because the list would be imperfect, and would therefore only lead to erroneous conclusions. But, Sir, I cannot forget that I am standing opposite the noble lord, the son of one of our greatest houses—of a house which, I am willing to admit, has exercised its vast possessions generally for the honour and dignity of England—which certainly did not inherit or otherwise acquire those vast possessions subject to the provisions of the forty-third of Elizabeth. As a matter of fact, therefore, this assertion is not true. But as a matter of principle, is it just? I am not disposed to assent to the principle that because an estate has been inherited or acquired subject to taxation which is impolitic, the tax is to be retained because it is inherited. If we are of opinion that the land of England should, under existing circumstances of unlimited competition, be as exempt as possible from peculiar taxation, I hold that we should take every fitting occasion to relieve it from that peculiar taxation. But advancing a step further, if you maintain these estates were inherited subject to the impost, I must make up accounts on both sides, and ascertain whether this property was not inherited and acquired subject to other laws which gave it an adventitious value; whether there were not laws to that effect which for a long series of Parliaments found favour with you—whether there may not be cases of a man's purchasing an estate because the Legislature had for centuries secured him a certain market for

his produce, and not only secured a market, but passed laws which offered a bonus for the exportation of his produce. I might, when you urge that poor-rates are an inherited impost, reply that the legislative advantages he inherited he also found ratified by consenting senates in succession, and that those advantages you suddenly, and in a manner he was least prepared for, deprived him of. The two arguments, then, generally brought forward on this question—first, the risk you incur of disturbing our local administration if you attempt to give relief to the oppressed property; and, secondly, that the property seeking relief has been acquired subject to these charges—I have referred to merely because I thought the present a fair opportunity for refuting them, and not because I am interested in refuting those propositions, inasmuch as the measures I shall submit to you are not open to either of these objections.

I think, Sir, the time has come, as I ventured to intimate it would, when we must seriously consider whether we cannot adapt the position of all those classes connected with the land, so far as regards taxation, to the new circumstances in which Parliament has placed them. We do not, on this side of the House, relinquish one jot of the opinions we have ever maintained on this subject, and I have therefore now only to repeat what I have said upon former occasions, that when the fitting opportunity may offer we shall be as fully prepared as you to act upon our convictions; but now, accepting your legislation as a fact; believing that there is in this House a pledged majority prepared to act upon those principles of legislation; and believing that those principles are deeply injurious to the interests of those whom we have the honour to represent in this House, and whom we wish to relieve, we propose now to enter upon a series of remedial measures, which may mitigate their sufferings, but which are founded on principles of political justice, which you cannot deny, and which are in conformity with those principles of economic science which you have adopted as the basis of your legislation. In the course of last year, when I submitted a motion to this House, the object of which was for the land to obtain some relief from the pressure of local taxation, I was told that my design was too vast, and I was assured

that the state of the Treasury at that time would not permit the Government even to consider any such proposition. I hope that I shall not be told now that my design is too limited, seeing that I have now confined myself to only one part of the wide field over which my view has previously extended. Circumscribed, then, within my present boundary, I would hope that the Government would support me if the propositions which I make be not only just, but essentially practicable. And now, with respect to those propositions: I propose to move several resolutions, if we get into committee, as I hope we may, which would lay the foundation of legislative measures connected with the poor-rate calculated to mitigate the distress and depression of the agricultural classes—a species of distress and depression which, it is agreed, cannot, like commercial distress and depression, be described as a ‘passing cloud.’

If we get into committee, as I hope and earnestly wish may be the result of my motion, the first resolution which I shall propose to the Committee would be that a sum, not inconsiderable, should be remitted to the owners of real property—a remission which would certainly not be open to either of the objections which I have already considered and answered. The first point which I propose to consider in committee is that class of charges connected with the poor-law which are known by the name of establishment charges. It is perfectly well known that these charges are not necessarily connected with local administration, and virtually are almost entirely independent of it; such a change would have no bearing whatever upon our admirable system of local government—that system would remain intact, its machinery unaltered, its chain of checks and control as before. I shall propose, then, that from the 25th of March, 1850, the establishment charges for the relief of the poor of the United Kingdom should be defrayed out of the general revenue of the State. This first vote, then, would have the effect of diminishing local burdens to the extent of little under 1,500,000*l.* sterling. Now, it is important not to forget that while those establishment charges are barely subject to local government, and while in dealing with them we leave the general fund for indoor and outdoor relief to be derived from

the same sources, and administered in the same manner and by the same hands, as heretofore, no one can attempt to contend that the burden of the establishment charges have been inherited or acquired with the estates which the owners of land now hold. The time at which those charges were created is not so much within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of this House as rather of the youngest.

The second resolution which I shall put before the Committee, if I succeed with my present motion, will be one in which I shall venture to deal with all rates which are raised by the machinery of the poor-law, but which have absolutely nothing to do with the maintenance of the poor, and which it is a flagrant injustice to add to the taxes for the support of the poor, and to levy off those who are already burdened to excess, by not only maintaining the poor, but paying all other local taxes besides. Some years ago the House passed an act for a general registration of births and deaths, the expense of maintaining which amounts to 60,000*l.* a year; and the task of defraying that annual expenditure was imposed upon real property alone. It was an easy way of dealing with the matter, by which you may go on *ad infinitum* augmenting the weight of local taxation on one species of property. Next came the charges of preparing the jury and burgess lists—somewhere about 24,000*l.* a year—and the bill was at once handed over to the Poor Law Commissioners, and the burden laid upon real property, to be raised by the same convenient machinery, the poor-rate. This was followed by the sanitary alarm, and Parliament could not help giving its instant attention to the causes of that alarm, and the means of their removal, and therefore we have had Nuisances Acts and Sanitary Acts; and in the regular course of such events the cost of those measures, which amounted to a considerable sum, was raised in the same way, and from the same quarter.

I should quite weary the House were I to proceed with the long catalogue of successive burdens heaped upon the land. There is the Vaccination Act, the Parochial Assessments Act—in short, the aggregate of these miscellaneous charges can scarcely be estimated at less than 500,000*l.* for England, and

probably 700,000*l.* per annum for the whole of the United Kingdom. There surely is no reason why the real property of the country should bear all these burdens ; and this mode of levying them certainly has nothing to do with, nor does it afford any security for, the continuance of that happy state of self-government which honourable gentlemen' opposite so highly appreciate ; that is already abundantly secured by levying millions upon the suffering land of England. I should propose, then, by my second resolution, that from and after the 25th of March, 1850, all rates, not being rates for the maintenance of the poor, which are levied under and by means of the machinery of the poor-law, should, with the exception of the police and county rates, be defrayed out of the Consolidated Fund ; and I hope that in making such a proposition I shall have the support of the honourable member for Montrose, who at least must admit that my propositions are sufficiently specific. Assuming, then, that I am so fortunate as to carry these resolutions, I shall still have another to propose. I have hitherto proposed to deal with a sum of 2,000,000*l.*, of which I calculate that two-thirds press directly on the suffering land ; and in so doing, I have not asked the House to depart from any of those ancient principles of government which are rightly so much revered by us. All I have suggested is, that we should transfer from the land, and from the classes connected with it, imposts of very modern date, which no one pretends on principle the land should endure more than other property.

The third resolution which I shall propose will be that from the same day, viz. the 25th of March, 1850, the cost of maintaining and providing for the casual poor of this country shall be transferred to and defrayed out of the general revenue of the United Kingdom. The House will remember that the casual poor are not at present a parochial charge. They are already supported in England by a Union Rate. This third resolution, from the difference in the law, would not apply to Ireland ; but to Scotland it would be a very considerable relief. These, then, are the resolutions, the expediency of which I propose to move in Committee. I cannot but think that there is much to be said in favour of them : they are just ; they are essentially

practicable. They require no new, they destroy no old, machinery; and the expenses of them may be defrayed from that balance in the Exchequer of which we have heard much and hope more. Acting with my friends in this matter, I cannot but regard it as a congratulatory circumstance that the elements of controversy are very slightly mingled with this proposition.

The Finance Minister, on the present occasion, cannot come before us to plead *in forma pauperis*. But these intended resolutions have, I think, other recommendations than their justice and their practicability. They are eminently conciliatory. The First Minister says we were in error in assuming, on the first night of the session, that there was no sympathy on the part of the Government with the sufferings of the agricultural classes. I willingly believe him. The noble lord has before this shown, and naturally feels, a sympathy with the agricultural classes. Their distresses are now severe. You cannot alleviate these distresses by referring, as some of the noble lord's colleagues have done, to the otherwise rampant prosperity of universal England. I will not say on this occasion that that prosperity has been obtained at the expense of the agricultural interests, or through the agency of their distress, but it seems to have a suspicious concomitance with those incidents. This, I trust, is not the tone the noble lord will adopt. I ask him in acceding to this motion to make no sacrifice of his principles, or in any way to compromise his previous policy. It is a happy occasion when he may maintain that policy, and yet evince his consideration for the sufferings of powerful and loyal classes. The noble lord may say, 'I have unbroken faith in the industrial doctrines which I have upheld in this House. I believe the practice of those doctrines is the real cause of the great and general prosperity which England at the present moment enjoys. But I deeply deplore the depression and distress of the agricultural classes. They are classes second to none in importance. I know, and I myself before have acknowledged, that they endure peculiar burdens, from which the other and the prospering classes are exempt; but until now I had not encountered the well-considered means of even their partial removal; and I am happy, as a practical statesman, to acknowledge that it is in the

power of Government and Parliament to mitigate their distress by the redress of these grievances.'

Sir, I can conceive nothing more dignified, more politic, and more consistent than such a course on the part of the First Minister. I cannot believe that he will be withheld from giving his sanction to these measures because they are brought forward by a political opponent. I have told the noble lord before this, I repeat it now, that on this subject of the land we have no party politics. Let the noble lord, or any other minister, do justice to the land, and he will receive from these benches a powerful, a cordial, a disinterested support. And if, with his assistance, we carry this motion to-night, I can assure him that it will not be on this side of the House that the result will be esteemed a party triumph. But it is not only to the Government that before the division is called I would make an appeal. I entreat the House itself well to weigh the consequences of the adoption or the refusal of these claims. It has been truly said that it is impossible to exaggerate the agitation which prevails out of doors with respect to this agricultural suffering. The honourable member for the West Riding himself acknowledged, the other night, that since the Reform Bill there has been no excitement equal to it. But what is its chief characteristic? Let me entreat the House to observe what is the chief characteristic of this agitation. Is it not an expression of opinion that appeals to this House are hopeless? That in this House there is no sympathy with agricultural suffering? Why what is that but a want of confidence in the institutions of the country? (Mr. Cobden: Hear, hear!) The honourable gentleman cheers as if I sanctioned such doctrines. I have never sanctioned the expression of such feelings; I never used language elsewhere which I have not been ready to repeat in this House. I never said one thing in one place, and another in another. I have confidence in the justice and wisdom of the House of Commons although I sit with the minority. I have expressed that confidence in other places: I never, indeed, supposed that the House would come forward and cancel all their convictions, to which the majority had probably arrived after long and painful deliberation; but, remembering what the



House did on the subject of the Sugar Bill, two years ago, I have expressed the conviction that I earnestly entertain, that this House, instead of being an assembly with a deaf ear and a callous heart to the sufferings of the agricultural body, would, on the contrary, be found to be an assembly prompt to express sympathy, prompt to repair, if it might be, even the injury, necessary in the main as they might think it, which they had entailed on the agricultural classes of the country. I feel that conviction now; I cannot believe that, in the present state of the country, when propositions are brought forward, as I think, with so much moderation, in a spirit of justice, urged, I hope, with temper—I cannot conceive that we shall be met with any heartless opposition.

I hardly know what arguments we are to encounter. All the usual ones to which I have referred are entirely shut out from this discussion. All they can say is, that ‘we ask so little, and that that little is so easy to be granted.’ We may, indeed, be told, as we have been told before, that we who are the advocates of a protective system ought to be content with nothing less than a recurrence to that system in justice to our constituents. Well, that is a style of objection that, with great respect to honourable gentlemen, I shall never condescend to reply to. I have that confidence in the good sense of the English people that, while I believe they are prepared, when the constitution gives them the opportunity, to vindicate the industrial principles which they think ought to prevail, yet in this House, where we are met by a pledged majority, which will scarcely listen to a discussion of that nature, they will deem we are only doing our duty, we are only consulting their interests in taking every opportunity to alleviate their burdens, in trying to devise remedies for their sufferings, and if we cannot accomplish immediately any great financial result, at least achieving this great political purpose, that we may teach them not to despair of the institutions of their country.

AGRICULTURAL DISTRESS, February 11, 1851.<sup>1</sup>

[In 1851 the distress of the agricultural classes was acknowledged in the Queen's Speech : and when on the above date Mr. Disraeli moved that ministers should be called on to introduce some remedial measures in conformity with the language which they had advised Her Majesty to adopt, their former majority of twenty-one was found to have sunk to fourteen : the numbers being 267 against 281. Mr. Gladstone neither spoke nor voted on this occasion. But the result was thought to have accelerated the resignation of Lord John Russell.]

**MR. DISRAELI** moved :—‘ That the severe distress which continues to exist in the United Kingdom among that important class of Her Majesty's subjects the owners and occupiers of land, and which is justly lamented in Her Majesty's Speech, renders it the duty of Her Majesty's ministers to introduce without delay such measures as may be most effectual for the relief thereof.’ He then proceeded —

Mr. Speaker, a condition of general prosperity in a country concurrent with the continued depression of a most important class of the community appears to me to be a conjuncture which should make a minister reflect ; but if such a combination of circumstances can be brought about by legislation which has at the same time produced the general prosperity and the particular depression, I think the subject becomes one which merits not only the consideration of cabinets, but also the deliberation of Parliament. These remarks, I think, apply to the present condition of the owners and occupiers of land in the United Kingdom. It was at first my intention to have offered to the House evidence now in my possession as to that present condition. I would have offered to the House evidence afforded by men in

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

various parts of the kingdom, and who are widely and extensively engaged in the cultivation of the soil—men who are in their class of the highest reputation and merit (many of them known to members on both sides of the House) in Scotland and in Ireland, as well as in England. I feel, generally speaking, that there is an objection to such evidence, however respectable and however supported by the names of those who offer their testimony. I feel that there is a general objection to such evidence being offered in Parliamentary discussion, because it is not subjected to cross-examination, and if brought forward by a private member of the House does not bear the stamp of official authority. Trusting, however, to the high character of that evidence, I should have felt it my duty to trouble the House at some length on this head, but for the admission in the Speech from the Throne and from Her Majesty's ministers. They declare that there are difficulties still felt by these classes of Her Majesty's subjects who are owners and occupiers of land. These admissions render it no longer necessary to dwell upon that evidence. They will curtail the observations I have to offer to the House, and will save me from making remarks which might bear a wearisome character. I think I may say, without any exaggeration, that the fact of the co-existence of great and continued depression among the owners and occupiers of the soil of the United Kingdom, which is not contested by gentlemen on either side of the House, whatever may be their opinion as to the cause or as to the policy which has produced the consequences—I think that this concurrence of what is called general prosperity and particular distress is a *prima facie* reason why we should inquire into the cause of that particular distress. If there be an impression that the same cause has produced the prosperity and the distress, then that is an additional reason why the House of Commons should enter upon an investigation such as I propose to them. I think there is a third reason why we should approach this discussion with a feeling that it would be becoming us all patiently and impartially to hear those who have to offer an opinion on this important subject; and that is, I may venture to say, that the consequences of our recent legislation, as far as regards the owners and occupiers of land were

not foreseen by the authors of that legislation or its principal favourers and promoters on the other side of the House.

I remember five years ago—and five years is a considerable passage of time, sufficient at least to allow us all to approach this subject with unimpassioned feelings; a sufficient progress of time to have brought experience with it as to some of the consequences that then occurred—I remember five years ago, that eminent man whose place I now unworthily occupy, and whose loss I never more deplore than when I have to discharge those duties which his vehement and indefatigable spirit would much more satisfactorily perform—I remember a very important question being then put by him to the First Minister of the Crown, who then proposed a repeal of the Corn Laws. Lord George Bentinck, early in the session of 1846, and before he addressed himself to the question which occupied him afterwards so much and so seriously, inquired of Sir Robert Peel whether he had taken into consideration the effect of a repeal of the Corn Laws on the commutation of tithes. He reminded the minister that in the last seven years the average which the occupiers of the soil paid as tithes was 58s. 8d. the quarter—that, assuming the consequences of the change would be to reduce the price of the quarter of wheat then 58s. 8d., the existing average, to 45s., he reminded the minister that in the next seven years the farmer would have to work down the average to 45s., and he asked him whether he had anticipated any such consequences, and whether he had prepared a measure to lighten the burden on the cultivators of the soil. The answer of Sir Robert Peel, I remember it well—but it is due to him to give it in his own words. Sir Robert Peel replied, ‘that he was not prepared to make any alteration as to tithes, as he did not believe there would be any material alteration in the price of wheat.’ Now, Sir Robert Peel lived to change his opinion on that point, for most of us would be familiar with the circular he afterwards addressed to his tenantry, in which he stated the price of wheat as lower than had been anticipated by Lord George Bentinck, and gave his opinion that there was no prospect of any increase in that price. Nor were these sanguine views as to the moderate effect of the new legislation confined

to the eminent person who presided over that cabinet. It was one in which the most distinguished members of it participated.

When we were accustomed to dwell on the probably ruinous price of wheat from the unrestricted importation of foreign agricultural produce, we were accustomed to be asked—I will not say, in a taunting manner, because I do not wish to make a single observation which by any possibility can be mistaken or may prevent us from approaching this discussion in so fair and temperate a spirit that we may arrive at the truth; but we were asked, ‘Where we expected the foreign corn to come from?’ Now, that is certainly a question which no gentleman on either side the House would have any difficulty to answer. Nor was the opinions to which I have referred confined to the cabinet that then presided over the country. The ministers who now sit opposite entirely shared in them. I see before me, I think, the right honourable gentleman the Secretary for War (Mr. F. Maule), and I can recollect his addressing this House amid the sympathising cheers of the assembly, and stating that the Scotch farmers had not the slightest fear of competing with the foreign producers; that he knew of a case that had just occurred at a very considerable farm in East Lothian—the farm of East Barnes, if I remember right; that it had been recently let, not only at a high rent, but at an increased rent; but then he said the farm had been taken by a man of energy and enterprise. Well, reading a Liberal Scotch paper the other day, the name of East Barnes caught my eye, and there I found that the proprietor of this farm of East Barnes—his name was Mr. Mitchell Day—in a very proper spirit and acting in a proper manner, had reduced the rent of the man of energy and enterprise by no less a sum than 650*l*. This shows that even a Scotch farmer is liable to error as well as an English farmer.

There is a minister whose opinion upon such subjects would naturally very considerably influence the House, who has, of all of them, shown the least reserve upon the point. If the sanguine statements and cheering calculations of the Chancellor of the Exchequer<sup>1</sup> could have compensated for the absence even of protection, they have not been spared, but have been extended

<sup>1</sup> Sir Charles Wood.

to the owners and occupiers of the soil with an exuberant generosity. He was not only always hopeful, but he always announced that the consequences which he confessed he did not foresee were only the results of what he called exceptional causes. Now the harvest was short; now it was exuberant; but whether plentiful or whether sterile, unfortunately for the owners and occupiers of the soil, whose difficulties continued—difficulties which are now recognised by our Sovereign—unfortunately for that important class of Her Majesty's subjects, the result was always the same. Whether it were peace, or whether it were war, whether the Continent were in a state of convulsion or in a state of tranquillity, the same effect was always produced in Mark Lane. But the Chancellor of the Exchequer not only accounted for this by what he called exceptional circumstances, but he always proved by ample arguments, and by what he called an appeal to facts, that these circumstances would not long influence the market. Last year, when, with reference to a specific proposition for their relief, I brought before the House the condition of the occupiers of land, that important class of Her Majesty's subjects, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for reasons which we all deplored, was then absent. But in 1848, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was present, and never did he favour the House with a more successful exposition of economical principles, or carry away, in the opinions of his supporters, more laurels than on that occasion. It was the occasion when I first placed in its proper light the long perverted question of local taxation.

I will not at this moment enter upon that subject. I shall have occasion to do so hereafter; at present I wish to refer to the speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer on that occasion in which, having despatched the question of local burdens—which he did to a great extent, and with his usual ability—he gave us his matured opinions and the matured opinions of the cabinet on what is called agricultural distress. The cabinet acknowledged agricultural distress in 1849, but then, they said, it was partial in its operation, and most vexatious in the south of England; but that it prevailed in all parts was denied. But they said it could be accounted for, and the cabinet, by the

mouth of the Finance Minister, accounted for that distress. The Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1849 'was inclined to think that the present depreciation of agricultural produce was very much caused by alarm.' He waxed still stouter in that opinion from the sympathy of his supporters, and in the course of five minutes he actually said, 'that there was abundant reason to believe that the present prices were unduly lowered from the language held at recent agricultural meetings.' I believe he even intimated that the principal cause of the depression of agricultural prices was the speeches made by my noble friend the member for Stamford. Now, no one appreciates more than I do the ability of my noble friend, or admires more the sacrifices he makes and the zeal and perseverance with which he devotes himself to the performance of his public duties; but highly as I may esteem my noble friend in other respects, I confess I do not ascribe to his eloquence or that of any member of this House the faculty of influencing the prices in Mark Lane. But the right honourable the Chancellor of the Exchequer said there were other things to be considered besides the price of grain. He told us that meat, a most important article, was to be considered; and while he deplored the price of meat as being low, he assured the House that it was only temporary depression. 'The price is temporarily depressed below the average rate.' Now, what was the average rate of 1848, which is the year he then referred to at the beginning of 1849, and which he said was a temporary depression, 'which he deplored and anticipated could not last any time'? Now, I have the average of 1848, as quoted in the speech of the right honourable gentleman, and I shall take the averages of the year 1850 at the same time, to see whether there was any good reason for the assertion that the depression was only temporary. The average of 1848, of beef, was 4s. 5½d. That was the average of a time of temporary depression; the average of the year 1850, for beef, was 3s. 8½d., taking the Smithfield official returns. So that after two years of temporary depression we are in a worse condition. The average of 1848, quoted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer—which was an unusually low price, according to the right honourable gentleman's statement.

and could not remain so low—for mutton was 5s. 2d.; but in 1850, after two years of temporary depression, the price was only 4s. 2d. Now, that is a reply to the observations made on this subject in the ingenious speech of the honourable gentleman the member for Norwich, on the first night of our meeting.

My only object in referring to the opinion of the Chancellor of the Exchequer is to show the Chancellor of the Exchequer that it may be possible to form an erroneous estimate on this important subject. And therefore, when great men on both sides of the House have formed erroneous opinions, it is still more the duty of the House calmly, deliberately and dispassionately to see whether it cannot discover the cause of this continued depression, and penetrate the reasons of such an anomaly that, in a country in which we are told in the Speech from the Throne, there is general prosperity, there should be depression, and continued depression, of one of the most important classes of the community. Well, that was the opinion of the cabinet in 1849; but what was the opinion of the cabinet in 1850? True it is, my right honourable friend, unfortunately, was not in his place when the subject was discussed last session. But, in another place, no less a personage than my Lord President favoured the world with the opinions of the cabinet on the important subject of the condition and prospects of the agricultural classes. It was the opinion of a statesman second to none for experience and judgment, and who from his high position and his connection with the soil naturally commanded the respect and confidence of the agricultural community. What was the opinion of the Lord President, expressed early in the session in the august assembly of which he is a member, and in order to relieve the anxiety of the depressed owners and occupiers of the soil? He told the country that the depression was caused only by exceptional circumstances, which would exist probably for many weeks. This eminent statesman—for he really is an eminent statesman—deeply interested in the land and sympathising with its cultivation not merely because he is himself a landed proprietor, informed us about this time last year that the idea of continued importations was simply absurd. Well, but when we find men of



such eminent sagacity and experience and such high position; when we find men, after giving all the attention they possibly can to the subject and expressing their opinions under a sense of the great responsibility attaching to all that falls from the lips of a minister of the Crown; when we find that these men have been equally deceived with their predecessors, it is an additional reason, I think, why the House of Commons, at least, should endeavour to fulfil its duty, and endeavour to arrive at a more sound and sagacious conclusion than that of those who have been very properly looked up to as its models and leaders.

I do not for a moment accuse the present Government of not having given the greatest attention to the subject. Not merely have we had the opinions on Scotch farming of the right honourable gentleman the Secretary at War; not merely have we had the repeated opinions upon details becoming his position from the Chancellor of the Exchequer; it is not merely that we have had the solemn, digested and recorded opinions of the cabinet by persons of the information and influence of my Lord Lansdowne; but we know that other members of the Government—not occupying positions so eminent or fulfilling functions so responsible, but still whose opinions are eminently entitled to consideration on such topics from having devoted their intelligence to the investigation of this subject—have favoured the House with the conclusions at which they have arrived. A cabinet minister has a great deal to do; we expect him to take a general view of questions and can scarcely expect him to be master of details, except in reference to the department over which he presides. But there are some members of the Government who devote themselves to economise details and have a particular talent for that branch of political science. For instance, the honourable member for Westbury; he is a member of the administration, distinguished, and justly distinguished, for his statistical acquirements and economical information. I can say this sincerely, that I know no man in the House who is more successful in demonstrating that that which has happened ought not to have occurred.

We were favoured with the opinions of the honourable member for Westbury last year in the discussions upon the state and

prospects of agriculture. The absence of the right honourable gentleman the Chancellor of the Exchequer rendered his assistance at that moment and his interposition in the debate doubly valuable, because the noble lord at the head of the Government, although eminent for his knowledge of constitutional law and his power of historic argument, it is understood has rather a distaste for figures, excusable in a great statesman who naturally devotes himself to great principles. The honourable member for Westbury<sup>1</sup> proved, however, that all the importations last year ruined the importers. No man in the world has proved more completely than the honourable member for Westbury that France could not send to England a single quarter of wheat; and none demonstrated more perfectly that the teeming millions of the United States were ready to devour everything that was produced in the valley of the Mississippi. Still, notwithstanding the honourable gentleman's calculations—notwithstanding his irrefragable reasoning, the difficulties of that important class, the owners and occupiers of land, continue. Now, the mention of the United States recalls to my mind that there are other great authorities who have touched on this subject—men whose opinions, mind you, have influenced the legislation of this House. There is an honourable gentleman, a county member, representing in a certain degree a constituency, but who is also intimately acquainted with all the interests of commerce, the member for South Lancashire.<sup>2</sup> I remember that honourable gentleman telling us that the English producers had no reason to apprehend any importation from the United States, because they had a natural protection in the article of freight. Freight, said the honourable member for South Lancashire—himself a Liverpool merchant, and an American merchant—freight, says he, with reference to the United States, is equal to a protection of 11s. the quarter. But how did it turn out? Is freight from the United States equal to 11s. a quarter? On the contrary, the eleventh part of 11s. would more correctly describe the result. And then, as for the continent of Europe and the places generally more contiguous than America, it is a fact that with our five years' experience

<sup>1</sup> Mr. James Wilson.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. W. Brown.

we have arrived at this result, that freight is no protection whatever, and that the expense of transport, generally speaking, from the continent of Europe does not exceed that from port to port in this country.

My object in making these observations is not in any way to build on these circumstances an argument in favour of retracing our steps—that is not the topic I am going to introduce—or of questioning the propriety of the legislation which these fallacious estimates and calculations have led you to adopt. That legislation may be beneficial and politic; still, politic as may be the course, beneficial as may be the consequences, you cannot deny that all your estimates have been wrong, and all your calculations erroneous. Well, the moral I draw from these circumstances is this, that, as a great many of our most distinguished men, on both sides, on this subject have unfortunately not been so sagacious as we have always given them credit for being, it is a reason that we should approach the subject, not in a spirit of haughtiness and conceit, with an overweening confidence in our own judgment and accuracy, but that seeing that a most important class in this country is in a state of continued depression, and marking the strange anomaly that that depression continues and is concurrent with what you call general prosperity, and which I accept as such—that you will feel it your duty, in a spirit of more temper and more patience than you have hitherto shown, to investigate this great subject and to take that course which I think justice and policy both recommend you to adopt.

Now, Sir, there is yet a fourth reason why I think the House should extend to this subject that patient and painstaking investigation to which I have referred. After five years' experience—after a lapse of time which allows us to look back into the past, I hope, in an unimpassioned spirit—I cannot resist the conclusion that during the great controversy as to the important changes in the legislation to which I have referred great injustice was done to the character and conduct of the British farmer. In all these discussions, and in that preliminary agitation out of doors, representations were made to an excited and perplexed community which, unfortunately

although most unjustly, conveyed the impression that the British farmer was an unskilled and a slothful man; a want of energy, and a want of enterprise, were accusations by turns thrown in his face—imputations from which scarcely anyone at last dared to vindicate him. True it is, there were some great facts which those who resisted the abrogation of the late law regulating the importation of foreign agricultural produce—there were some great facts of which they ventured to remind the House even at that moment of passion. It could not be denied that under the abrogated system, whose virtues I am not now eulogising, and the spirit and effect of which legislation I am not now attempting to vindicate—that is not the subject to which I am going to call the attention of the House—but I may be permitted to say that some great facts were elicited which none denied, although few listened to. The House could not deny that the British farmer, stigmatised as he was, had succeeded in winning from the soil a greater amount of produce than any farmer of any country of any quarter of the globe; it could not be denied that the acre which at the period of the American war yielded an average of twenty bushels of wheat as its produce, yielded at the time that the Corn Law was repealed an average of thirty-two bushels. It could not be denied, because the evidence was on the table of the House—it could not be denied that in the quarter of a century that had elapsed between 1821 and 1846 the population of this country had increased at the rate of 32 per cent., while the produce of wheat had increased at the rate of 64 per cent. It could not be denied that those men who were daily and unjustly told that they were so deficient in energy and enterprise had themselves, in 1845, when not one of them dreamed that their protection would be withdrawn, imported from the remote coasts of the Pacific a curious, novel and most valuable manure to the amount of 4,000,000 cwt. Sir, these were great facts which could not be denied. What wonder that these men should have covered with exuberant crops the kingdom of Scotland, notwithstanding its stern soil and sullen skies; that they should have cultivated Salisbury Plain, as had been said by the honourable member for Westbury, like a garden; that they

should have clothed with rich harvests the sands of Norfolk, the fens of Cambridge, and the morasses of Lincolnshire? Let us, after five years' experience, not refuse to do justice to these maligned characters. For remember how these men, who were suddenly called upon to compete with the foreign produce, were counselled to act, and what they were told was to be their compensation for the severe trial to which they were exposed. It was to be increased production of the soil.

I remember that eminent minister who proposed that great change—I doubt not, from what he believed to be an irresistible and inevitable necessity, and which I have no doubt he did not propose without some pangs for the possible sufferings of a class who were wont to look up to him with confidence and regard—I remember his saying, it was in the increased production of the soil the British farmer would find his compensation, and he had such confidence in the progress of science and the energy of that class of men that he did not doubt they would be able to baffle and beat down all the difficulties they had to contend with. I remember Sir Robert Peel saying that no man could turn over the 'Agricultural Chemistry' of Liebig who would not feel that the productive powers of the soil had been, after all, but feebly developed. Now, what was the prime remedy in the work of Mr. Liebig? It was the application of certain mineral manures to the soil, by which the British farmer would so increase his produce as to obtain compensation for the unequal competition to which the change of our laws subjected him. But what has occurred? Why, that this famous theory of mineral manures has utterly broken down and been succeeded by no other recognised as effectual. The whole is admitted to have been founded on an enormous fallacy, and utterly unproductive of the results anticipated.

Sir, I say this also is a circumstance which in the discussion of this question should teach us to be charitable and to approach the consideration of the condition of the soil in a very different spirit to that which we have hitherto extended to it. I remember when this great controversy began actively in this House, it was always treated by us as a farmers' question; and it was incessantly thrown into our teeth by our adversaries that

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it was not a farmers' but a landlords' question. Now, I should have thought that the greater diffusion of economical knowledge which at present exists would have put an end to this fallacy. But from some observations which I have recently met, by persons of great authority on those subjects, I find it is still believed that rent is a sort of arbitrary exaction, a kind of feudal *tallagium*, which is the reward of conquest, and that when we talk of the depression and difficulties of the occupiers of land, if the owners of the soil were prepared to sacrifice what is called rent all those difficulties would vanish. Sir, I think the time has arrived when we ought to terminate that fallacy as well as many others. I should think that a majority on either side of the House will agree with me that, in an ancient country where there is a great breadth of land in cultivation, and a great variety of soils, rent is an economical result as certain and as inevitable as the harvest is a natural result after the seed-time. The only way you can terminate rent is to throw every soil out of cultivation but the very best; and the only way you can prevent the best paying rent is by loading it with such an amount of burdens and imposts that after the cost of production nothing is left but the average return of profit for the capital employed. Now, if I have stated this correctly—if that be a statement which science sanctions, and which no man with a regard to science will presume to question—I want to know what becomes of that barbarous outcry against rent which we hear from persons of great authority on this question; and whether it is not a vulgar error we are circulating in that community we should lead and enlighten, when we hold out to the masses that any attempt to seek relief from the distress affecting the owners and occupiers of the soil is merely an attempt to maintain rent in England? Far from this, I think the whole tendency of our laws is to blot out one class of the agricultural hierarchy, and that the farmers. I think the tendency of our laws is very much to bring the agricultural community again to two classes—namely, the proprietor and the peasant. Is that a result which the House or any section of it desires?

Sir, I was always taught to believe, and I most sincerely do



believe, that the middle class is the best, as it is the best consequence of civilisation. You are making war upon a most considerable and not the least respectable portion of the great middle class; and therefore, when I am told this is a landlords' question, I have offered you some suggestions which I hope may induce you to believe that, both economically and socially, this is a fallacy. Sir, I trust the House will excuse me having made these somewhat preliminary observations to the subject to which I shall more strictly adhere in the further remarks I have to offer to its attention. My wish is, to bring the House on both sides to forget the past—not to allow the feelings of a controversy which has now lasted five sessions to confuse the clearness of our judgment; but in a temperate and impartial spirit to do that which I believe the great body of our fellow-subjects wish us to do—to endeavour to ascertain the cause of this suffering, and if possible to remedy it. And here, Sir, that there may be no misconception of my object in making this motion, I beg permission to state what my object really is. In the first place, it is not, as we have been recently told with some authority—it is not a debate upon the condition of the people. I find the condition of the people described in the paragraphs of the Speech from the Throne which have just been read to the House. I accept that description of their condition; it is one of general prosperity concurrent with the suffering of a particular class.

Do not let me be met to-night, then, with Reports of Poor Law Commissioners or Registrars General. Do not prove to me to-night that pauperism has decreased, and marriages have increased. They are the facts that prove my case, and all evidence of that kind should be delivered from this box and not from the one opposite. I am also extremely anxious that I should obtain no support to-night on false pretences, or incur any opposition from the same cause. I trust, for example, no honourable gentleman will rise to-night and say that this motion is a direct or an indirect attack upon the new commercial system. Far from it: it is in consequence of your new commercial system that I have felt it my duty to make this motion and to adapt, if I can, the position of the owners and

occupiers of the soil to that new commercial system. Nor let any gentleman support me to-night under the idea that this is an attempt to bring back protection. It is nothing of the kind. Last year—and I adhere to what I then said on this subject, severely, strictly, even religiously—I said then that I should not in this Parliament make any attempt to bring back the abrogated system of protection, and I gave my reasons for that course. Sir, I deeply deplored at the time the circumstances under which that change took place; I deeply deplored that the Parliament and the ministry which were formally, if not virtually, pledged, and, what was more important, which were in the opinion of the community pledged, to uphold the abrogated system—that the Parliament should have subverted it. Sir, I think under these circumstances there was a clear cause of quarrel between the Parliament and the constituencies, but I cannot forget that immediately after this great change a general election took place. An opportunity was afforded to the constituencies, even if they had been betrayed, to recall the legislation and annul the abrogation which they deplored. I cannot forget that the agricultural body in particular were warned by their best and most powerful friend, who is now lost to us, not to lose that opportunity, because it was their only one. I cannot forget that they rejected that counsel, and that, misled by the superficial circumstances of the hour, by prices which were the consequences of a rare accident, they did not support us in the policy we recommended. I cannot consent that the laws regulating the industry of a great nation should be made the shuttlecock of party strife. Sir, I say that if I thought by a chance majority I could bring back that system popularly called protection, I should shrink from doing so. That must be done out of this House; and it must be done by no chance majority, but by, if not a unanimous, a very preponderating expression of public opinion; and no other result can be satisfactory to any class or conducive to the public welfare. Honourable gentlemen, if they condescend to recollect anything that I have said, will do me the justice to acknowledge that I am only repeating now what I have said before; so that no man can be in error as to my motives on the policy which I wish to pursue.

This being premised, I wish to call the attention of the House to those difficulties which Her Majesty in her gracious Speech deeply deplores still to exist in an important class of the community.

What is the reason, when all other classes are prosperous, that important class should suffer. Why is it that the cultivators of the soil, whom we all recognise to be men of energy and of enterprise—whose great virtues we now acknowledge—what is the reason that the cultivators of the soil of the United Kingdom cannot compete with the foreign producer? Sir, I believe that the reason why the cultivator of the soil in the United Kingdom is at this moment embarked in a hopeless contest with the cultivators of foreign soils is the weight of taxation to which the cultivator of the soil in England is liable. The taxation of this country generally speaking, though time has mitigated, and circumstances stronger than time have reduced it—the taxation of this country is still universally acknowledged to be heavier than that of other countries. Heavy as it is—heavy as it might be even if it were double the weight—I would not on that ground offer any plea on the part of the owners and occupiers of the soil. Whatever may be the weight of taxation, they are prepared, if it be in their power, to endure their portion of it without a murmur. Whatever the amount of the duties may be on tea, on tobacco, on malt, on sugar, it will be admitted that the agricultural classes bear their quota of the burden. As to what that share may be I may have an opinion of my own, but I will not introduce it into this debate; I will not enter into an attempt to calculate the numerical amount of the classes connected with agriculture and compare them with other classes. I will make no invidious comparisons between bodies which I wish to be emulous and not hostile; but this you must admit, that, whatever be the weight of your taxation, the agricultural classes bear their fair proportion of it. Unfortunately they bear more.

What I wish to do to-night is to ask you impartially—if it be not impossible to be impartial in matters of finance—to survey your financial system and to see whether it be not a fact that it strains the energies and presses upon the resources of

the owners and occupiers of the land more—much more—than upon any other classes, to see whether you have not in this country an enormous financial and fiscal system which has been created in consequence of the artificial state in which the agriculture of this country was placed by the legislature of this House. I ask you to see whether any statesman could have ever dreamt of inventing such a system if he had not at his command the industry and capital of a numerous class—perhaps the most numerous in the kingdom—who by the provision of an assured market would be enabled to bear continually a great aggregate burden. I know the extreme difficulty of taking a dispassionate and unprejudiced view of the subject. Unfortunately, we are all from an early age so accustomed to details and so habituated to view our financial system merely in detail that I am not at all surprised the honourable gentlemen opposite should not immediately have come to the conclusions at which I have arrived. But I will endeavour, with their permission, to place the question in such a light that, my object being only to elicit truth, I do not despair of being able to influence even their convictions; and therefore I will in the first place take a somewhat general view of our system of finance. Let us suppose now that an individual without prejudices but possessed of those economical attainments necessary for such a study—let us suppose that such a person had for the first time examined the financial system of England; let us suppose, that some one of those distinguished foreigners who it is expected will visit our metropolis in the course of the present year, being interested in economical pursuits, and struck with the wealth and energy of England—let us suppose that such a person who may have been Finance Minister in some constitutional government wished to acquire some general idea as to the manner in which the revenue of England is raised. Now, of the great mass of taxation raised from the people of England I will take three items which are the three most considerable. Altogether they form an amount of nearly 50,000,000*l.* These 50,000,000*l.* are produced, first, by external imposts; secondly, by what is now called inland revenue; and, thirdly, by local contributions. By your customs, by your excise, and by your local taxation,

nearly 50,000,000*l.* sterling. Now, what is the character of the first class of this taxation? This distinguished foreigner will learn that nearly one-half is raised from the cultivators of the soil being prohibited from producing a particular crop, or by the Government making it impossible for men to produce another by the great imposts to which they would be subject. If he go to the inland revenue he will observe that more than two-thirds of that inland revenue are raised by a colossal impost upon one crop of the British agriculturist. If he take the third division—namely, local contributions—he will find that, at the most moderate calculation, between 7,000,000*l.* and 8,000,000*l.* and more out of the 13,000,000*l.* are directly paid by the agricultural class, and the whole 13,000,000*l.* levied from a limited class of the community. Now, these are the principal features which the foreign investigator will observe in our financial system.

Let us now in detail examine that which we have contemplated in a wider point of view. I take your customs. One-fourth of them almost is produced by a law that prevents the British cultivator producing a crop of tobacco. And then I shall be told, in extenuation of this extraordinary law, that the land of England is not favourable to the production of tobacco. That is an observation that is stereotyped for a minister of England. But the ingenious foreigner will remember that almost every country in Europe does produce tobacco, and that some of it is remarkably good. He must remember that in Holland they produce such good tobacco that it is actually exported to Havannah, where they make cigars of it to be smoked in London. But I might tell him that there are some soils in England eminently adapted for the cultivation of tobacco, and I might tell him that in the sister island especially there were great capabilities for its production. And here I must express my astonishment when I heard the President of the Board of Trade,<sup>1</sup> some two or three sessions ago, say in this House that the climate and soil of Ireland were not adapted for the growth of tobacco, that not one of the 105 gentlemen from Ireland, who are always telling us that their country is not sufficiently

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Lubbock.

represented, rose in his place to contest the minister's statement. I should have thought that some of them on the other side of the House must have remembered that tobacco had been cultivated even recently in Ireland with great success—in Wexford, in Wicklow, in the King's County, and other districts which I should have thought they might have recollected. I think that they will recollect that an eminent political economist—a supporter of the principles of free trade, and of course therefore an advocate of those laws which restrict British industry—stated that the climate and soil of Ireland were so well adapted for the cultivation of tobacco that it would be found impossible to raise the necessary revenue of the country if it were permitted to grow there. I think, Sir, that when the Prime Minister deemed it his duty to rise upon the first evening when Parliament met and solemnly warn the farmers of England, over the table, that the time had come when they could no longer depend upon the wheat crop, it might have occurred to the noble lord that it was eminently unjust to support laws at the same time which prevented them from producing other crops. And here, by the by, I must beg leave to offer an observation in reference to a remarkable expression made use of by the noble lord the other night, as I was not quick enough to remind him of it at the time. I understand the noble lord to say that he deplored the rapid transition that had taken place in respect to the laws affecting corn, and he seemed to account for the depression of agriculture by the rapid transition from the old law to the new one. Now, I confess I do not understand the meaning of this phrase—the state of transition. *I imagine that the state of transition is fully accomplished, and that we have now arrived at a fixed state of things.* But I am surprised that the noble lord should be the minister to deplore the rapid mode by which this transition was accomplished, because I remember that when the late Government, by what I humbly conceive to have been a very prudent and well-considered arrangement, made that transition gradual, the noble lord found fault with Sir Robert Peel for prolonging the state of transition the shortness of which he now deplores. I believe that the noble lord was

are produced by an enormous tax upon a British cultivator of the soil. It becomes me now to consider the remaining branch of the subject, and I will endeavour to do so with the greatest brevity I can command; but I must throw myself upon the indulgence of the House. It is, Sir, obviously for the advantage of the community at large that the subject should be deliberately and amply discussed. I come, then, to the third division of the amount of the revenue of which I am treating—namely, that which is produced by local contribution. Some time has elapsed since I brought before the consideration of the House the whole subject of our local revenue, especially as it affected the land of this country. I took occasion then to place that subject of such vast interest in a just and true light. It is a question, I believe, which had not been before considered in its legitimate aspect and true point of view. Hitherto the subject has been always discussed by rival calculations as to how much our local taxes had been borne by one description and how much by another description of real property. But the question had not been fairly put before the country. This enormous revenue of 13,000,000*l.* per annum is not a question between town and country, or between a lease and a field, but it is in fact a question whether it should be raised from—according to the most moderate calculations—one-third of the public, and not rather from the whole, the money being expended for purposes of general utility and public advantage.

Sir, I was not successful in the first motion I made on that subject, nor did I expect to be successful. I grant that the proposition I made might be styled unreasonable. It was, perhaps, unreasonable to ask the House for ten shillings in the pound of the debt that was owing to the land. But when you are not accustomed to pay debts, such demands are naturally considered to be very rude and unreasonable. The discussion did good, however, and although there was great difficulty in carrying on a discussion of that kind, because then I had to begin at the beginning, to lay down abstruse principles to prove that the support of the poor was one of universal obligation, and so forth; and yet advantage resulted from it, and next year we found the area more limited, and much taken for granted that

was previously contested. Sir, I was then unsuccessful in obtaining a large, but after all only a partial, measure of relief. But what occurred last year? I then proposed a measure which was more limited in character, but one which I will say was, if possible, more just; for I admit, for the sake of discussion, that the objections raised against a larger measure of relief from local burdens—such as a leading to centralisation, increased expenditure, and other evils predicted to follow from it—are of great weight. I may, however, here observe that I cannot see that any of the evils thus described could be greater than the political injustice of making the suffering class of the population pay for all the rest. But, admitting these to be evils of a great character, I contend that I proposed a measure that was open to none of those objections. It was not open to the objection that it was calculated to relieve real property from the imposts it had inherited, because I sought to deal only with those imposts that had been laid upon the land within the memory of every honourable gentleman here. I asked the House whether they thought it consistent with justice—there being a great surplus of revenue—that all those new charges which were laid upon the land should be continued; and whether we might not relieve the land to that extent from its burdens, those taxes being for public purposes, without interfering with the system of local government and local distribution. I pointed out to the House that of late years a vast number of taxes were thrown upon the poor-rate. For instance, if an elector was to be registered, the expenses were to be placed upon the poor-rate; and if a child was to be vaccinated, the poor-rate was to be burdened with the cost. There was a variety of these charges thrown for convenience of levy upon the poor-rate, and yet not connected with the relief of the poor. I have before me these several charges, all based upon the poor-rate, without any reason why this rate more than any other rate should defray them. I asked whether it was not a favourable opportunity for the House to take the whole question of these burdens, the injustice of which was now acknowledged, into their consideration. I asked the House whether the surplus revenue should not be so disposed of as to prevent the agricultural interest being the only



sufferer; whether it was not a happy opportunity for the House to perform an act of public justice, and for the ministry to show their sympathy for this suffering class. You know the result of that proposition. I do not, however, look back with regret at the discussion that then took place. I may say without vanity that the proposition was temperately conceived, because it was sanctioned by the approbation of a very large party in the House.

Well, now I ask the House again to consider the position of the land in reference to local taxation. It is an enormous injustice that one species of property alone should pay 13,000,000*l.* of taxation which should be paid by all. But in our position the grievance is much more aggravated when we remember that out of the 13,000,000*l.*, by even the calculations of our opponents, the land pays between 7,000,000*l.* and 8,000,000*l.* It is not necessary for me to enter into all the varieties of our local taxation: I will allude for illustration only to that discussion on a very limited portion of them which is fresh in the recollection of the House. Since that debate the question has greatly advanced. Originally, I had to discuss the abstract justice of making every class pay equally for the poor-rate. So little advanced was the opinion of the House then, that it was not willing to recognise the principle that the support of the poor was a general obligation. But since last year the question has much advanced. An organ of the Government has given their sentiments on the whole subject before a select Commission of the House of Lords, appointed to consider the laws relating to parochial assessments. It has been justly considered of such importance that the evidence of the Secretary of the Treasury has been printed as an official pamphlet. Now, this is the case of the Government, and I acknowledge that they could not have trusted their case to one more competent to state it. The honourable member for Herefordshire (Mr. C. Lewis<sup>1</sup>) has brought to this question all that power of thought that distinguishes him in all his pursuits, and that talent for investigation

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards Sir George Cornwall Lewis, Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1855 to 1858; Home Secretary, 1879-1891; and Secretary for War from 1891 to 1893.

for which he is so particularly marked. And what is the acknowledgment of this gentleman? He has given up the whole question. He acknowledges that, in regard to the general policy of imposing a local rate exclusively on one particular species of property, it is most unjust. I will read his evidence :—

‘With regard to the general policy of imposing local rates exclusively upon one class of property, I am quite prepared to accede to a proposition which is laid down in a letter upon the transfer of local burdens, written by a noble lord,<sup>1</sup> a member of this committee, which has recently come under my observation. These are the words to which I refer: “The virtue of the law of Elizabeth once admitted, it must be difficult for a man to affirm that any peculiar description of property should by any vested or inherent principle be exempted from paying its proportionate quota to the maintenance of the poor.” I am quite prepared to admit that, unless it can be shown that, unless there is some special reason in favour of a local tax limited to real property, it is more fair and equitable to defray the expenditure out of a national tax which should comprehend all species of property. It seems to me that, whenever any expenditure whatever is proposed, the presumption is in favour of making it a national charge paid out of the national exchequer, and that an exception only can be made from that general rule on account of special circumstances arising in the particular case.’

And again :—

‘I have already ventured to state to the committee my opinion that, whenever there is a question of defraying any particular charge, the presumption is always in favour of making it a national charge to be defrayed out of the national exchequer.’

One more passage :—

‘You state that you are of opinion, looking merely to the justice and equity of the considerations, that it would be more proper to raise the funds for the maintenance of the poor by

<sup>1</sup> Lord Malmesbury. The letter was addressed to the committee, and is to be found among the minutes of evidence. He was for creating a new tax, based upon the Income Tax, to be called the Poor Tax.

means of a national tax than by local taxation; but the practical difficulty of doing so constitutes in your mind the only, though a very formidable, objection? Yes.'

This evidence of Mr. C. Lewis may be described as the case of the Government on this important subject of local taxation. With that ability and depth of investigation which always distinguishes the gentleman, he has arrived at the truth which was scarcely tolerated some years ago—that truth that is not only now recognised in this House, but in the country generally. The basis of the extraordinary and unequal system of local taxation which prevails in this country has been the industry of the land, which the Government know it could safely appeal to, because the law hitherto secured that industry a market.

I am reminded, by the point to which I have now arrived in this discussion, of a charge which to a certain degree may be deemed a local tax, though it has hitherto been considered in a less limited light. I could have wished to treat this part of the subject at some length, but time forbids me. I allude to the subject of tithe. I have recalled to the recollection of the House the inquiry made by Lord George Bentinck, in 1846, as to the effect of the commutation of tithes in the event of a fall in prices of agricultural produce. I need not remind the House that the fall in price was much greater than was assumed by that eminent man. The probable result of the change of the law as conjectured by Lord George Bentinck would be to reduce the price of the quarter of wheat to 45s.; it is, however, now reduced as low as 37s. Let me first remind the House of the consequences of the fall of price upon the cultivators of the soil as regards the tithe commutation. The tithe rent charge calculated upon this year 1851, is 96*l.* 11*s.* 5*d.* for the 100*l.*, according to the prices of the three crops ending in the year 1850. The 96*l.* 11*s.* 5*d.* is the rate at which the farmer pays. He receives only 73*l.* 2*s.* 11*d.* The difference at this moment to the farmer is 23*l.* 8*s.* 6*d.* on the 100*l.*, and to realise that sum he absolutely has to sell at this price twelve quarters of wheat. Between the tithe charge commuted according to the rate of that law and the present prices of agricultural produce—and I see no prospect of their rising—the farmer has to pay

a forfeit of twelve quarters of wheat. That, the House will recollect, is the effect of the tithe commutation. But I am not going to dwell on that point. The effect of the tithe commutation is, though grievous, transient. But I must remind the House that, totally irrespective of the commutation, the effect of tithes upon the owners and occupiers of the soil has been held by a most eminent political economist—a man whose authority has influenced our legislation in the repeal of the Corn Laws—has been held at a rate of not less than 5 per cent. I am going to read a passage from the work on taxation by Mr. McCulloch. Mr. McCulloch, who was a free trader long before many honourable gentlemen opposite were free traders, has written with considerable ability on all subjects of economy, and is particularly happy in a talent for summing up evidence on any economical question. He was a pupil of Mr. Ricardo,<sup>1</sup> who was a great and original thinker, and once an ornament of this House, and whose untimely end, with that of Mr. Horner<sup>2</sup> and Mr. Huskisson,<sup>3</sup> furnished a dark page in the illustrious annals of the House of Commons. I mention those circumstances that the House may recollect that these are the opinions of Mr. Ricardo and his pupil previous to the repeal of the Corn Laws, as to the effect of tithe, and then I will quote you what was their contemplation of the consequences of that repeal in this respect upon the owners and occupiers of land. This is a sort of subject which unless it be discussed at some length will not be satisfactory to our friends out of doors, and therefore I trust the House will grant me more than usual indulgence. Mr. McCulloch in 1845, echoing the principles of that great man Mr. Ricardo, thus wrote on tithes :—

‘No branch of manufacturing or commercial industry is subject to a tax at all similar or equivalent to tithe. We have already seen that under the existing regulations, it operates

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Ricardo, member for Portarlington, died of inflammation of the brain, Sept. 11, 1823, in the 52nd year of his age.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Horner, who entered the House of Commons in 1807, died in September 1817, in his 40th year, of a disease of the lungs said to be of very rare occurrence.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Huskisson was killed by a locomotive engine in September 1830, while present at the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway.

partly to increase prices, and partly to increase the rents of the untithed lands; and we have further seen, that under a system of free trade without duties the present incidence of tithe would be completely changed: and that it would no longer raise either prices or rents, but would fall wholly on the landlords and occupiers. But we are not to attempt to bring about what is believed to be a great national improvement by shifting the burden borne by the public to a peculiar class. This would be flagrant injustice, to be vindicated only by the most overwhelming necessity. Luckily, however, we have not to deal with any such unreasoning principle: and hence the obligation, in the event of the ports being opened, of imposing a duty on foreign corn sufficient to countervail the tithes.'

And he then shortly after proceeds:—

'When the commutation is completed, the fixed and invariable corn rent will be a novel and strongly-marked feature in the economical condition of the kingdom. Had tithe been commuted a century or even half a century since, it would have been a very different matter. But considering the very advanced and peculiar state of the country at the era of the commutation, and the fact that our average prices have been for many years considerably above those of the contiguous continental States, it is pretty evident that the fixed rate due to the tithe owners may easily come to have a very serious operation on the interests of agriculture, and consequently on those of the public. We have every confidence in the national resources, and in the elasticity and buoyancy of the national industry. But we are not on that account to shut our eyes to possible contingencies. And at all events, the fact of the land being burdened with a fixed corn rent, ascertained when cultivation was far advanced, is far too momentous to be forgotten or overlooked in dealing with restriction on importation.'

These were the opinions of Mr. McCulloch in 1845, himself most favourable to the removal of restrictions on importation, opposed to the Corn Laws, and most sincerely, but viewing the question like a man of sense who feels that no political arrangement which is not founded on justice can last. Since Mr. McCulloch wrote that, he has published a new edition of the

‘Wealth of Nations’ by Adam Smith, and in his appendix to that edition he has written a treatise on tithe. The question was viewed then by Mr. McCulloch with all the advantages of experience, and at the same time with every preconception and prejudice in favour of emancipated commerce, and with feelings on the subject of the Corn Laws which he had pronounced in a most uncompromising manner in years when very few gentlemen opposite had adopted them; and what is the conclusion at which, in 1850 (for the edition was printed last year), Mr. McCulloch had arrived? Thus he concludes the new treatise on tithe. Deriding then when he wrote, which probably was in 1849, the possibility—for he has always been of the school of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and always expects prices to rise—deriding even then the possibility of any fall in agricultural produce below 46s., thus he terminates his treatise: ‘We do not, however, think there is much chance of those unfavourable anticipations being realised,’ the anticipations being the present prices; ‘but if they should,’ says this pupil of Ricardo, this great authority, ‘either the commutation charge may be reduced or an adequate countervailing duty may be laid on foreign corn.’ Mind, that is not my proposition; I am not making any proposition. What I am doing at present is showing you that the only way in which you can account for the present agricultural distress is, that the agriculturist is overweighted and has to contend against a mass of taxation, straining his energies and taxing his resources, to which no other producer in England is liable; that he has not only to bear his quota of the general mass of taxation, but that your financial and fiscal system, originating under quite different circumstances, lays upon his back, least qualified to endure them, burdens which other classes do not share. But it is often said by those who are of opinion that the land of England is perhaps subject to severe taxation, and who may not have taken that general view to which I have wished to gain the attention of the House, ‘It is very true; there is something in what you say; it cannot be denied that nearly one-half of our customs’ duties are raised by restricting or prohibiting agricultural industry. It cannot be denied that two-thirds of our inland

revenue is raised by immense imposts on agricultural productions; it cannot be denied that seven-twelfths of the local revenue are paid by direct contributions from agricultural purses; but then the land has exemptions, or we think it has.' And, generally speaking, the enormous injustice which I have sketched to-night is palliated by statements of that kind. I am going to meet them, not as an advocate, but as one anxious to arrive at the truth; and the principal and sole object of this motion is to terminate those controversies which, I think, have injured the public spirit of the country. I am going to see what justice there is in that allegation; and if there be exemptions enjoyed by the land I will not attempt to disguise or palliate them; and as my statement depends entirely on facts and arguments, and not on sentiment, it is open to all honourable gentlemen opposite who condescend to listen to me, to prove my statements erroneous or demonstrate my conclusions to be fallacious.

The case of agricultural exemptions brings us to another branch of our system of revenue—namely, the stamp duties. In agricultural discussions this is the usual course. The probate and legacy duties are left out and the agriculturist throws the stamps on conveyances at the head of the free-trader who is indignant at paying a large impost on personal property. I admit that under the present probate and legacy duties personal property pays more than real property. I admit even that the payment made by real property in stamps is not perhaps, on the whole, a charge countervailing the excess paid by personalty. I wish to state the case with the utmost fairness, and I will make this admission at once. But I must observe that considerable error exists as to the incidence of the probate duty; and if gentlemen opposite will only investigate the subject of stamps as they bear on the two classes of property, they will arrive at a conclusion not so much adapted as they suppose to the opinions which they uphold on the subject of taxation.

Remember this—and I make no statement which is not proved by evidence taken by committees of this House—that at this moment, of legacy duty, in amount 1,200,000*l.* per annum,

500,000*l.* is paid directly by land ; because, although Mr. Pitt did not carry his original Bill, which made real property subject to these taxes, he did subsequently contrive to pass a Bill which rendered all land sold under wills subject to these taxes ; and by evidence before this House it appears that five-twelfths of the legacy duty is paid directly by land. Therefore, as far as the burden on land is concerned, that fact must be taken into consideration. But, remember this, all leasehold property, all ecclesiastical tenures, pay the legacy duty, and in the 700,000*l.* that remain irrespective of the 500,000*l.* so largely contributed by freehold property, leaseholds and ecclesiastical tenures are included. But remember also, when we consider the incidences of these taxes upon land, that all the stock-in-trade of the farmers, the largest stock-in-trade of the kingdom, pays both legacy and probate duty. I think, therefore, when honourable gentlemen take that view of the case, and when they add that which is paid directly by stamps on conveyances, they will find that the account does not stand so much in their favour as they imagine.

I remember once, on a similar occasion to this, the honourable member for Orkney<sup>1</sup> made a great point, as he thought, of the exemption from taxation enjoyed by the farmer in respect to his windows and his horses. But you must remember that the windows of the man who has a shop are also exempt from taxation ; and I do not understand, therefore, why the farmhouse, which is the farmer's shop, should not be free. And when we remember that the machinery of the manufactory is free, why should not the horse, which is the machine of the farmer, be also exempt ? These are little points, but they require notice. But I could afford, when honourable members talk of the exemptions from taxation enjoyed by land, to have omitted all these considerations and to have admitted the stamp duties, which, I think, I have shown some cause to consider not arranged peculiarly in our favour, were very much in favour of land ; because I must remember, and recall to the recollection of the House, that all this time there is a considerable branch of the public revenue which is not only raised, but which to the amount of 2,000,000*l.* per annum—for such is

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Anderson.



its virtual amount—has been raised for a century and a half, from land—and from land alone—and that is the land-tax: a tax, by the by, which was not intended by its original projectors to apply only to land. And therefore, when the exemptions of land are taken into consideration I think, as I have stated the case—and I hope I have stated it in a spirit of impartiality—it may prove one which we shall not hear much more of.

Sir, I have now gone through, with one great exception, almost every important feature of our financial system. I have reviewed the taxation of the country, very imperfectly, from the greatness of the subject and from my unwillingness to press too much on the patience of the House; but I have reviewed the taxation of the country generally with reference to its bearing upon the owners and occupiers of land—upon that important class of Her Majesty's subjects who are suffering difficulties, depression, distress, and who continue to suffer them, in a country where all classes, as we are informed by the Sovereign are prosperous. I have shown you that as regards your external revenue, nearly half is raised by the agency of the land; that two-thirds of your inland revenue is raised indirectly from the land; that seven-twelfths of your local revenue is raised indirectly from the land. I have shown you, examining your stamp laws, that those exemptions which have been so much talked of are in a great degree illusory, and that those who dwell on these exemptions forget that there is a peculiar tax on land alone which raises a sum of 2,000,000*l.* per annum. I am not surprised, when I see all this, that the owners and occupiers of land, in the present state of the law that regulates the importation of foreign agricultural produce, should be suffering difficulties. On the contrary, I am obliged to consider by what means it is that the present system is carried on, and what is the wonderful machinery by which a financial system which is the creature of protection, and which protection alone could have upheld, should be still able to work in this country when the whole system of protection has been swept away. That to a certain degree we may account for it by the inroads which may have been made upon accumulated capital no man can deny who brings to the subject his impartial consideration.

That classes may flourish when they are living upon the capital of a particular class, I think by no means wonderful. But I do not explain the great financial miracle which has occupied our attention merely by that hypothesis, because I see before me a gigantic and curious machine, by which we have been carried through years of unrestricted importation, restricted industry, and colossal imports.

We know well that a great financial instrument was brought into this House by an eminent minister, whose pride it was to have introduced the new commercial system, the virtues of which I am not here to night to challenge, but the advantages of which on the part of the owners and occupiers of land I wish to enjoy. We know what that wonderful financial instrument was: it was the property and income tax. 'Remember,' said Sir Robert Peel to the Manchester school, 'that in order to have your cotton free of duty the land must consent to the imposition of a property-tax.' Generous and confiding land! And by that powerful and efficient instrument this remarkable system has been carried into operation, conducted in its course and permitted to accomplish its results. And what was the consequence of the new fiscal law? The most curious thing is, that when I look to the returns of the property and income tax, this mighty and mystical sum that has produced those great results, I find that at least a moiety, and perhaps the greater part, has been levied on the owners and occupiers of land, those owners' rents being reduced, and those occupiers making no profits. Now, that is your financial system. I have viewed it with the exception of some petty points of general application. I viewed it in its full scope, and considered it in all its bearings. I find in that financial system the cause of agricultural difficulties, and, if I am asked to cure them, my answer is brief. If you ask me what are the remedies for the difficulties of the owners and occupiers of land, as a member for an English county, whose industry is devoted only to the cultivation of the soil; as one who, however unworthy—and no one feels it more than myself—is on this occasion the organ of the opinion of my friends around me, I tell you what my remedy is. We require justice. We ask you not to prohibit or restrict our industry.

We ask you not to levy from us direct taxes for public purposes to which very few other classes of the country contribute. We ask you not to throw upon us—according to your account, the only class in the country which is in a state of prolonged distress—the burden of your system. That is what we ask. We think the system has produced the difficulties and distress. I say, at once remove the enormous injustice under which we suffer; let us be fairly weighted in the race. We shrink not from the competition which you have thought fit to open to our energies; but do not let us enter into the struggle manacled.

But I have another duty to perform in this House. Whatever my feelings may be for my own constituents, however clear their case, we are members of Parliament besides being members representing particular constituencies; and I have no hesitation in saying that with these feelings I am perfectly prepared to discuss these measures impartially, temperately, and calmly, the tendency of which I believe to be to alleviate and perhaps to remove these difficulties. But I must protest against its being supposed that if I enter into such a discussion fairly with the House, I am asking any special advantages for those owners and occupiers of land whom you have so long unjustly treated, and who are at this moment so grievously suffering. Enter with us into the discussion of those measures which we may think on the whole will tend most to bring about that political justice which ought to be the object of all. Try to propose such measures, and suggest those compromises of prudence and conciliation which the interests of all classes demand, and which unless they are consonant with the interests of all classes we do not for a moment expect. I would attempt it now, and I am prepared to do so; but that I must appeal again to that indulgence of the House which I fear I have already over-taxed. I am prepared to enter into this discussion on the clear understanding that, in anything I say, I am saying it generally as a member of Parliament and with a view to the common good; the only object, to procure such an equal justice for all classes as is possible in an ancient society. I will, then, express without reserve my opinion that it would be most disastrous to the community if you should accord all those claims

which I believe in the spirit of severe justice the agricultural interest has a right to demand. I am perfectly aware that in a country like this, however we may adjust taxation, however anxious we may be to consult the interests of all classes, it is impossible to come to an arrangement in which, in my opinion, the greater amount of burden will not fall on the land.

There have been several suggestions made in this House for the relief of the land, and I will very briefly, and of course much more briefly than its merits require, notice some of them. I will take the two remedies, somewhat vague in their expression, which have been principally counselled by the gentlemen from Manchester. They have always laid it down as axioms, that what was wanted for the land was more labour and more capital, and then, they say, you will be able to contend against the difficulties with which you have to struggle. Let me remind the House that for the four years during which the owners and occupiers of the soil have been counselled to employ more labour and more capital, there have existed in our statute-book laws the very object of which was to restrict the employment of labour and the distribution of capital. 'Employ more labour,' you say to the cultivator of the soil. Before you gave him that advice, why did you not deal with the Settlement Laws? The minister who repealed the Corn Laws felt the absolute necessity of meeting that question. He devolved the duty of considering it to a member<sup>1</sup> of his cabinet eminently qualified, perhaps above all men in this House, for the consideration of such a question. But, unfortunately, that great change in the imperial policy of England took place at a moment of precipitation and of hasty counsels, and was addressed to a House little inclined to consider a question of so difficult a character. The effort that was made by that cabinet was not felicitous; but in the haste and hurry in which everything was prepared on that occasion, except the measures which repealed our protection, the minister did produce a measure with respect to the Law of Settlement, and promised other measures of great importance with respect to the highways. But I ask the House whether the partial and somewhat crude measure then produced

Sir James Graham, at that time Home Secretary.

by the Government of Sir Robert Peel was a measure which at all contended with the difficulties and evils of the case? True, the President of the Poor Law Board<sup>1</sup> told us the other night that he had a measure in preparation; but if such a measure was necessary it ought to have passed before the Corn Law repeal. What the measure is I know not, for I have not yet seen it; but what I have seen of legislation on this subject is not encouraging. For five years we have had to bear the brunt of this, and the owners and occupiers of land were taunted with not employing more labour when you had an ancient code on the statute-book the object of which was to prevent the proprietor and occupier of land from employing labour, and forcing him to employ the least efficient.

Then I am told we might employ more capital; and yet in 1844 you passed in this House a law<sup>2</sup> the whole object of which was to restrict the distribution of capital in those channels which communicate with the cultivators of the soil. Employ more capital, they say, and when the farmer goes to the country banker, the banker tells him, 'The Bill of 1844 prevents me from assisting you.' Well, we who attempt feebly to support this interest, in 1848 called the attention of the House to the consideration of this law. We showed you, and men second to none in authority on such subjects were of opinion, that the principle upon which that law was founded was fallacious. We showed you to the best of our ability and conviction that the opinions expressed respecting over-issue, redundancy and depreciation were utterly erroneous and not consistent with the existence of a really convertible paper currency. But what was our success? We could do nothing. You went about the country giving your advice to the farmers, and telling them that one of two remedies for their evils was the employment of more capital; while in mockery you passed a law which naturally has curtailed the distribution of capital in those very districts where capital is wanted. In my opinion you ought to have prepared for this great change—the repeal

<sup>1</sup> Mr. M. T. Baines.

<sup>2</sup> The Bank Charter Act, of which, in the opinion of Mr. J. S. Mill, 'the disadvantages greatly preponderate.'

of the Corn Laws—by placing the cultivator of the soil and of course the owner of the soil in a juster relation, not only with your financial, but with your banking and industrial laws. There is nothing more desirable than that you should bring capital to the land. That everyone feels to be an object of great importance; but you forget you have laws of partnership in existence which are as a barrier to laying out capital on land. The question of limited partnership has engaged the attention of a committee of the House. Great opinions have been given on the subject, and whether we should introduce the system of limited partnership which exists on the Continent has been the subject of discussion. You have against it Lord Overstone, and in its favour Lord Ashburton. My own feeling is, that in a country like England, where commercial capital is so abundant, it may be questionable whether you should change your law of partnership, whether you should introduce any violent change in the habits of commercial men; but it is quite clear if you put the cultivator of the soil upon a fairer system as regards taxation with his fellow-subjects so that there would not be an unwillingness to embark in the cultivation of the land, that a law of limited partnership *en commande*, as it is termed, so far as the cultivation of the soil is concerned would be most beneficial. But have you attempted to do that? Did you when you repealed the Corn Laws? Or when year after year on that bench you had been delivering opinions upon the fortunes of the agricultural world which were always erroneous, have you ever given any consideration to the subject?

Sir, it is not necessary for me to dwell but for a moment or two upon those plans which have been brought forward in this House for the relief of the land from local burdens. By favour of the House of Lords you have had placed upon your table a project for a national rate which had been matured by a noble lord,<sup>1</sup> a member of the other House of Parliament. There is no doubt that the subject is one which very much engages public attention, and I believe the scheme has acquired a great degree of public approbation. But has the minister ever considered

<sup>1</sup> Lord Malmesbury (*vide supra*, p. 303).

it? Has he even deigned to allow the subject of a national rate to form matter for consideration by the cabinet. Observe, I am not giving my opinion in favour of a national rate; but no man can deny that it is a proposition of that importance, and moreover, has so enlisted national sympathies, that it is at least worthy of consideration. Now, there are great objections to a national rate for the relief of the poor, but there is no objection so great as the enormous injustice of the landed interest paying in their present state of suffering more than their fair proportion of the poor-rate; and no fallacy is greater than that which is always brought forward by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he shows us that year after year house property has been paying a greater proportion of poor-rate than it did, and that it now rivals, and even exceeds, the amount paid by the land. That, as a measure of relief to the rural districts, is perfectly fallacious. It is possible that in Lancashire house property may pay more than land on the average. The burden of poor-rate on the land in Lancashire may be proportionately reduced, but that circumstance has not reduced the poor-rates in the county of Kent or Sussex. They feel the injustice the same. The injustice is as great, and the injury is as great, whatever may be the effect of an absorption of a portion of the local rate by house property in the north of England. Great as are the objections to a national rate, I think that many of them may be met with considerable success; but I shall not dwell upon them to-night. It would be an abuse of the patience of the House. I must repeat one observation, however—that there is no objection to a national rate so great as making a limited class pay for that for which all classes ought to pay. It is quite unnecessary for me to speak of the measure which I brought before the House last year, because I believe I may say that, as far as the opinion of the House is concerned, it was in favour of that measure. No arguments, indeed, of any weight or amount were ever offered against it. It was not only recommended by justice, but it was not inconsistent even with the most selfish policy. Sir, it was said at that time, that if the amount of relief which I then proposed, and which I think would have taken off something like 2,000,000*l.* from real pro-

perty, and of that 1,500,000*l.* from land—because it was part of that project that 500,000*l.* should be taken off our suffering fellow-subjects in Ireland, who, from the action of their Poor Law were peculiarly entitled to relief—it was then said that by throwing that amount upon the Consolidated Fund, which was my proposition, very little relief substantially could be given, inasmuch as the Consolidated Fund was, after all, to a great degree paid by those who were to be relieved from the poor-rate. I have always been aware of these objections to placing the remission of taxes upon the Consolidated Fund; but it is the best course to recommend in this House by an Opposition which urges a remission of taxation upon a principle of justice, because it is the most obvious and simple way for making all pay, instead of a particular class. And when all pay, then it is for them to settle if the burden be too great for them to bear. But it is the first step in a financial transition. That was the reason why I offered that suggestion to the House. There have been other suggestions made by which the remission can be effected, and by which a peculiar class might be freed from a peculiar burden for a public purpose, without increasing the burdens of the community.

It has been proposed that we should supply a sufficiency of revenue by the plan suggested by Mr. McCulloch, in the passage which I read to you—namely, by a fixed duty on corn. Now, I have this objection to discussing the proposition of a fixed duty on corn. My views, and the views of my friends, are very liable to be misrepresented on the subject. I say again, that as far as I am concerned as an agricultural member, and speaking for those who represent generally agricultural constituencies, we want nothing more than justice. We cannot admit for one moment that a fixed duty or a countervailing duty upon corn is an arrangement in favour of the agricultural interest. It is a financial political arrangement which as members of Parliament, as ministers, and as statesmen, upon a balance of circumstances, we may think upon the whole would or would not make what was once called the ‘best bargain for the community.’ The other night the noble lord got up and, with a sorrowful expression of countenance, as if he acknow-



ledged in his conscience and to his conviction that the land was unjustly treated, and that something ought to be done for it—knowing that the great weight of taxation falls unjustly upon the land, and that the weight of local taxation was iniquitous, the noble lord got up and shrugging his shoulders, said, ‘What can I do? I do not know that a 5s. duty would do anything for the farmers.’ Why, the farmers do not want your 5s. duty, or an 8s. duty, or even a 10s. duty. Ascertain, if you think fit, and to the best of your judgment, what the community owe to a particular class whom they cannot pay. If it be your opinion and your proposition that a 5s., an 8s., or a 10s. duty is, on the whole, a reasonable compensation for their undue share of the public burdens, induce them if you can to accept that compensation, by which, like all settlements of that kind, the person who is to receive it will probably receive one-half his due. But that is a question for us to consider as members of Parliament representing the community. In the name of the agricultural interest I solemnly protest against considering such a proposition as an arrangement for the advantage of that interest. The argument in favour of a fixed duty upon corn has been brought before the House with great ability as a mere financial exercitation, if I may say so, by my honourable friend near me. He stated the theory upon which a fixed duty was supposed not to increase the price to the consumer. He stated that it was in the nature of things that the producer in foreign countries would endeavour to adjust his supply to the demand, and not allow the British speculator to take all the profits. But it so happened that at the period when he called the attention of the House to the subject, circumstances had occurred which remarkably illustrated that theory; for it did appear that in the year 1848, in the month of January and the month of February, there was no duty upon foreign corn, and in the month of March and in the subsequent month there was a duty of 7s. or 8s., and that imports and prices remained the same. The average price in January and February 1848 was 50s. 2d.; from March to December, with a duty of 7s. or 8s., only 51s. 9d., and in February with a duty of 1s. the price remained the same.

Now, I say that these are phenomena to which I cannot shut my eyes. They are phenomena upon which any gentleman who has considered the subject has a right to give his opinions, and if I give my opinion, which I do most sincerely, that a moderate fixed duty would not raise the price to the consumer, I wish perfectly to guard myself from being supposed to suggest it as any favour to the agricultural interest. You must meet this question influenced by various considerations. As statesmen and as members of this House, you have to consider how you can do justice amongst all classes of the Queen's subjects, and yet at the same time prevent any violent changes in the financial system of the country. That is what you have to consider. We, I need not say, represent a class who can bear a good deal. I am told sometimes, 'Why do the landed proprietors and the farmers come to this House? No other trade comes to the House of Commons when they are suffering.' Why, what property, what industry does the House of Commons interfere with as it interferes with the property and industry of the owners and the occupiers of the soil? Let me find a revenue raised in this country with equal regard to articles of manufacturing production as it is raised in this country with regard to articles of agricultural production. Let me see applied to some articles of great importance and of general use—the produce of your manufactures—the same laws which now apply to tobacco and malt, and should I not find you then coming to this House with your complaints? What petitions, what speeches, what motions, and what leagues, until the public mind of England had been brought fully to comprehend the enormity of the injustice inflicted upon you. Suppose we passed a law that all stockings should come from abroad free of duty, and that the domestic manufacturer should pay a duty of 1,200 per cent., what would the manufacturers say to that? And yet this is only a parallel case to that of the owners and occupiers of the soil.

Then, although the noble lord will remember what his eminent predecessor, Sir Robert Walpole, once said of the landed gentry in this House, with regard to their endurance of taxation, I am told that it is very strange that in a House of

landed proprietors the land should be so burdened, and that the fiscal system should bear so hard upon the land. A specious and yet a superficial observation ! True it is that from circumstances, mainly from our territorial constitution, the great body of members of Parliament were for a considerable time landed proprietors ; but, owing to that happy government by parties, to which we owe so much of our public freedom and public spirit, these landed proprietors were always divided into two hostile camps, and the commercial interest, though once not over strong, still existed in this House, and at times produced even in distant reigns very considerable persons. Therefore there was always a great body of landed proprietors perfectly prepared to support the interests of commerce. Whether they did efficiently and wisely support the interests of commerce is another thing ; but this I know, that the merchants of England believed they did ; the merchants and manufacturers of England believed that Sir Robert Walpole and Mr. Pitt were ministers who had a strong bias in favour of trade, commerce, and navigation ; and our statute-book is loaded with the laws, perhaps not over-wise, which were passed at the instigation of those persons. I say that, not to create any acrimonious feeling. I have no wish that any law should pass this House—I have no wish, with reference to the agricultural interest, that any law should pass this House which is not consistent with the welfare of all classes of Her Majesty's subjects. But in the midst of the welfare of all classes, I cannot consent that the welfare of the owners and occupiers of the land should be overlooked.

I am convinced that if this system goes on, we shall reach a point where the resources of this class will no longer be able to bear the strain upon them, and that the effects resulting to all other classes will be such as to be greatly deprecated. I believe that, if you continue on this course, it is not merely the owners and occupiers of the land that will be sacrificed, but that others will share their fate. But why, I ask, should the owners and occupiers of land be sacrificed if their injury is the consequence of unjust legislation ? Consider, therefore, in a temperate and conciliatory spirit those suggestions which, I confess, at much too great a length I have now made to you. Remember that

they are made on behalf of a suffering class, and especially of the farmers of England, of whom I principally speak—men who, in the course of these great changes, and under circumstances of great trial, have, I think, shown great virtues. Consider the question in a spirit of equity. I do not ask you to-night to give a vote upon any specific measure; I should be most unwise—I should be acting not with fairness towards the House upon so great a question, if I were to ask you to give a vote specifically. It is not my duty to propose that you should give a specific vote. I remember—the interruption of the honourable gentleman reminds me of the words of a great writer who said that ‘Grace was beauty in action.’ Sir, I say that justice is truth in action. Truth should animate an Opposition, and I hope it does animate this Opposition. But truth in action is the office of a minister, and I would exact it from the noble lord: not, Sir, in any hostile spirit; I have always wished that this question should be settled by the noble lord—by the minister of the day—by a minister who, on account of his position, can never look with an adverse feeling to the land of the country. I say again that I do not think it right in me to bring forward a specific measure, but I have a right to ask you to come to a specific conclusion; I have a right to ask you to declare by your vote that these methods for remedying the evils and bringing about a fair adjustment, at which I have glanced, are worthy of consideration; I have a right to ask you that you should express a strong opinion that it is the duty of Government to consider these measures, and to adopt these measures, if they cannot devise others less objectionable which will achieve the same result. That is what I say. I do not want you to pledge yourselves to any fixed duties or counter-vailing duties, or shifting of burdens, or changing the law of settlement, or amending the laws of partnership. They are all of them great and important questions, and well worthy of the attention and consideration of the House of Commons. Sufficient information exists upon all these subjects for a minister to act upon. All I say is: Declare to-night that in this respect a minister shall act; that the minister who has year after year acknowledged these complaints and difficulties, and

who himself by his tone would seem to imply that he has in his heart recognised the injustice which the land and the landed classes are enduring, shall act. I ask you to-night to declare in a manner which cannot be mistaken that it is intolerable that in a state of general prosperity a suffering class should exist, suffering from unjust legislation, and that it is the duty of the administration of this country to bring forward measures that may terminate a state of affairs so much to be deprecated.

Sir, as I said before, I wish the noble lord to undertake this office. I am altogether innocent of mixing up this question with the passions of party politics. The speeches I have made in this House are not speeches which are adapted to please thoughtless societies out of doors or meetings which are often held in the country, at which my name is mentioned as one who does not do sufficient justice to the sufferings of those who complain. Sir, I pardon all these ineuendoes; I can make allowance for the strong feelings of worthy men placed in the trying circumstances in which the farmers of the United Kingdom are now labouring. But right or wrong, of this I am convinced, that the course I have taken with respect to their interests has been the result of long thought and careful observation, and that I have asked for nothing for them which justice does not authorise and policy recommend. If I make no further appeal to the noble lord, it is from no hostile feeling that I decline doing so, but because I have appealed twice in vain. I now appeal to the House of Commons, though it is called a free-trade House of Commons, and may be a free-trade House of Commons; but I appeal with confidence because I have confidence in the cause which I advocate, and confidence in the fair spirit which I believe animates their bosoms. They have now an opportunity which ought not to be lightly treated—a golden occasion, which in my mind will not easily find a parallel in the records of our Parliament of England. They may perform a great office and fulfil an august duty. They may step in and do that which the minister shrinks from doing—terminate the bitter controversy of years. They may bring back that which my Lord Clarendon called ‘The old good-

nature of the people of England.' They may terminate the unhappy quarrel between town and country. They may build up again the fortunes of the land of England—that land to which we owe so much of our power and our freedom; that land which has achieved the union of those two qualities for combining which a Roman Emperor was deified, *Imperium et Libertas*. And all this too, not by favour, not by privilege, not by sectarian arrangements, not by class legislation, but by asserting the principles of political justice and obeying the dictates of social equity.

AGRICULTURAL DISTRESS, March 28, 1879:<sup>1</sup>

[After an interval of nearly thirty years men once more found themselves confronted with problems which a long continuance of abundant harvests had consigned to temporary oblivion. The unexampled distress, however, brought about by the failure of four harvests in succession overthrew all ordinary calculations: while the increasing competition from America led many men to believe that, even with the return of better times the farmer would still find himself far removed from his former prosperity. Then at last the cry for Protection was revived. And twice in the House of Lords in the session of 1879 was Lord Beaconsfield obliged to remind his followers that the country had settled this question 'in another generation,' and that it was too late now to revive it. The following speech was in reply to the Marquis of Huntly, who rose to call attention to the depressed condition of agriculture, and to ask Her Majesty's Government if they intended to appoint a Royal Commission to inquire into the causes of it.]

MY lords, although the appearance of this House to-night is not one which shows that interest in the subject which the noble marquis probably anticipated, that is not, I am sure, occasioned by any want of sympathy with the suffering classes of this country. Myself, I should have been quite prepared to leave the matter in the hands of those noble lords who have dealt with it, had not a direct appeal been made to the Government by the noble marquis; but I feel I should be wanting, not only in my duty, but in courtesy to the noble marquis, if I allowed that appeal to pass unnoticed. The noble marquis has called our attention to the depressed state of agriculture and of commerce and trade in this country; but he has not offered us any information in detail upon any head of his

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

motion—or rather of his inquiry—except with regard to agriculture. I am sure the noble marquis will pardon me if I venture to observe that I think his treatment of that subject was not characterised by novelty or by that adequate acquaintance with the proceedings which have occurred in both Houses of Parliament upon the subject upon which he chiefly dilated—namely, the peculiar burdens upon real property—which might have been expected. The noble marquis seems to have founded his inquiry to-night in a great degree upon some speeches which I myself made—made in ‘another place,’ and in another generation. Then I thought it my duty to open a subject which had been very seldom entered into; and at a time when the agricultural interest of this country was deeply suffering, and was by no means hopeful as to the future, I endeavoured to show that some relief might be obtained by a more equitable adjustment of the public burdens. It was impossible to deny the justice of the principle upon which those motions were made. Indeed, although I was then, as the noble marquis has reminded us to-night, the leader of the Opposition in another House of Parliament, on every occasion on which I brought that subject before the consideration of the House of Commons, my motions were supported by numbers which almost equalled the majorities which, for the moment, defeated them.

Many of your lordships will remember that, though the justice of the plea is undeniable, still at no time was the relief contemplated of a character or amount adequate to meet a state of affairs like the present, and to be a competent remedy for the evils to which the noble marquis has called attention to-night. The noble marquis should remember that the answer to my appeal to Parliament at that time made by those who resisted, not the justice, but the adequacy of the remedy I proposed, was that ‘if a readjustment of local burdens did take place, the relief of the land, which then only was suffering, could not be measured by the amount of local taxation. It was shown at the time by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that, taking the sum of 85,000,000*l.* a year as the amount of rental upon which rates were charged thirty years ago, the amount on which



landed interest was assessed was only 40,000,000*l.* But the noble marquis should be, and no doubt is, aware that during those thirty years two things have happened : In the first place, that there has been considerable relief afforded to the real property of the country, of which land forms a large portion ; and, secondly, that the proportion of rates, in so far as they fall upon land, is much reduced, so as to be levied now on no more than one-third of the real property of the country. If these are facts—and they are founded on official returns—I cannot for a moment bring myself to believe that some small readjustment of our local taxation can bring such relief to the land as will reanimate it under the unexampled depression it now endures. Then the noble marquis omitted to remember that there has been, in fact, a considerable amount of local taxation remitted from real property during the period from which he originated his speech ; and he also should have recollected the circumstances in which that reduction was made. The adjustment of our local taxation ceased to be a party question in the House of Commons. The gentleman who of late brought it forward was a county member (Sir Massey Lopes), and his political connection was with the party that was then in Opposition, and of which I was the representative and the leader. But it was not a party motion, and he carried it by a majority of a hundred, because it was acknowledged, on both sides of the House, not to be a party motion, and because those who peculiarly represented the house population of the towns perceived that they would themselves have the lion's share and principal benefit of any considerable remission of local taxation. All this must be known to the noble marquis, and I am surprised that he did not hesitate before he recommended a remedy for agricultural distress which, on reflection, he must perceive to be utterly inadequate to give the relief which is required. No one, I think, can deny that the depression of the agricultural interest is excessive. Though I can recall several periods of suffering, none of them have ever equalled the present in its intenseness. Let us consider what may be the principal causes of this distress.

My noble friend who has addressed you (Lord Norton) has

very properly touched upon the effect of the continuous bad harvests in this country. If we are to accept the figures of the highest authority upon agricultural subjects and statistics, the loss on a bad harvest, such as we had in the year 1875, was no less than 26,000,000*l.* sterling. It is, however, true that at that time the loss and suffering were not experienced or recognised as they were in the old days when the system of protection existed, because the price of the food of the people was not immediately affected by a bad harvest; and it was not till the repetition of the misfortune, by two bad harvests in further succession, that the diminution of the wealth of the country began to be severely felt by the people generally—not by the agriculturists only, but by those who were interested in trade and commerce generally. The remarkable feature of the present agricultural depression is this—that the agricultural interest is suffering from a succession of bad harvests, and that these bad harvests are accompanied for the first time by extremely low prices. That is a remarkable circumstance which has never before occurred—a circumstance which has never before been encountered. In old days, when we had a bad harvest, we had also the somewhat dismal compensation of higher prices. That is not the condition of the present; on the contrary, the harvests are bad, and the prices are lower. That is a new feature that requires consideration. There can be no doubt that the diminution of the public wealth by the amount of 80,000,000*l.*, suffered by one class, begins to affect the general wealth of the country, and is one of the sources of the depression, not only of agriculture, but also of commerce and trade. No candid mind could deny that this is one of the reasons for that depression. Nor is it open to doubt that foreign competition has exercised a most injurious influence on the agricultural interests of the country. The country, however, was perfectly warned that if we made a great revolution in our industrial system, and put an end to the policy of protection, such would be one of the consequences which would accrue. I may mention that the great result of the returns we possess is this—that the immense importations of foreign agricultural produce have been vastly in excess of what the increased de-

mands of our population actually require. And that is why such low prices are maintained.

I have here the average import of wheat in the years 1867 and 1868 and in the years 1877 and 1878. Stated in quarters, the quantity was 8,000,000 quarters in 1867 and 1868, and 13,848,000 quarters in 1877 and 1878. Now, 3,000,000 quarters would have been quite sufficient to meet the wants of our increased population; but the actual increase of 5,000,000 quarters is equal to the supply of more than one-sixth of our whole population, or nearly twice what was required by its actual increase. That is to a great degree a cause of this depression. You have, then, in the first place, continuous bad harvests, which would in any case bring depression, not on the agricultural interest only, but, by the diminution of the public wealth, on trade and commerce generally; and, secondly, you have, as far as the agricultural interest is concerned, this greatly increased competition from abroad. I think there is another cause, but, as it is not peculiar to agriculture, I will leave it while I make one or two observations on a subject very slightly treated by the noble marquis, and not so fully as I could have desired by my noble friend who has addressed us. It has been assumed throughout this debate that there has been on the part of the trade and commerce of the country a depression not only equal to that which the agricultural interest is labouring under, but that that depression was identical and similar in its effects and causes to those by which agricultural distress has been produced. Now, so far as I can form an opinion from the documents I have seen, the case is the reverse. That there is immense depression in trade and commerce no one can deny; but instead of the depression of trade and commerce resembling at this moment that of agriculture, it is quite the contrary. Agriculture just now is producing much less than it did before—nearly 1,000,000 acres have gone out of cereal cultivation—and it is suffering from foreign competition, which even in its own home market it has unsuccessfully to encounter. That, however, is not the condition of our foreign trade. The volume of our foreign trade is not at all diminished.

It is perfectly untrue, so far as I can form an opinion on

the subject, that we have lost the markets of the world, or that any branch of foreign industry—generally speaking, of course—is successfully competing with the English. That there may be occasionally, in the multifarious transactions of English commerce, some particular article that may find itself for a moment shut out from the markets, or that, owing to a combination of circumstances, it might meet with a successful and unexpected competitor, is one of the necessary consequences of that multifariousness. The great fact nevertheless remains, that after a period of continued depression the volume of production has been exactly the same. There has been of course less profit; but the volume of industry has been the same; the same quantity of goods has been manufactured; there are no markets from which we have been successfully shut out, and no competitors with whom we cannot satisfactorily enter into rivalry. Here is a return which I think proves the case—it is a return of British and Irish exports. I find that the exports in 1873 were, in round numbers, 255,000,000*l.*; while in 1877, they were only 198,000,000*l.*—showing an apparent falling off of 57,000,000*l.* But if you value the products of 1877, which only produced 198,000,000*l.*, at the same rate as the products of 1873, which were valued at 255,000,000*l.*, you will find that the difference between them is less than 1,000,000*l.* It is, therefore, clear that, although the depression of trade and commerce is undeniable, that depression does not arise, as in the case of the agricultural distress, from the loss of the power of production, or from severe and successful competition with foreign industry. On the contrary, during all these years of depression we have been producing an equal quantity of goods—the same volume of English manufacture has been sent into the world—only we have been obtaining for them lower and still lower prices. That, it appears to me, is an important circumstance, and one which demands our deep consideration.

I doubt not the depression in our home trade is affected very much, as I freely admitted at the first, by bad harvests, totally irrespective of the principle on which our industrial system may be established, whether it be a protective one or one of free imports. It is clear that a series of bad harvests

greatly diminishes the sum of national wealth, and must materially, in any circumstances, interfere with the trade of the country. It is quite possible, as we have known from our own experience, that one bad harvest, which years ago would have created discontent and great suffering recognised by every class, might be passed over in the circumstances in which we now find ourselves. But if you cannot pass over two, you certainly cannot pass over three or four; for, although the last harvest was not bad, it was garnered under such circumstances that, so far as the farmer was concerned, it was a bad harvest. I have said I admitted that the causes of agricultural depression were principally these: in the first place, the bad harvests; in the second place, foreign competition, which the country adopted, not with haste or in rashness—which it had an opportunity of rejecting, because a considerable party in Parliament gave it that opportunity, and on the merits of which, after it was established, the country was appealed to and a Parliament elected on the issue placed before it, and yet which it did not choose to change. The second cause, I say, is to be found in this competition which you have, not precipitately, but determinedly, adopted; and there is besides another cause, which is, in my mind, not peculiar to agricultural distress, but which is equally applicable to commercial distress: and that is the effect which the production of gold has exercised, and is at this moment particularly exercising, not only on commercial transactions, but on the value of the other precious metals.

I do not know that I can put the matter more clearly before your lordships than in this way. After the repeal of the Corn Laws there was considerable suffering among all classes. Not merely in the agricultural classes, but in trade generally, there was great discontent and dissatisfaction. I do not myself believe it was the immediate effect of the repeal of the Corn Laws: it was probably a reaction after the great stimulus, no doubt, which had been created in consequence of the extraordinary expenditure on the railway system in England. Be that as it may, very great discontent existed. Suddenly, after three or four years, there was an extraordinary revival in trade and a great elevation in prices. How did that occur? One of the

most wonderful events in the history of the world happened, and that was the discovery of gold in California. In 1852, 36,000,000*l.* of gold were poured into Europe, and when your lordships recollect that the business of the world until that time had been carried on by an amount of gold which, I believe, never reached 6,000,000*l.* a year, you can at once apprehend the effect of this discovery. In one year there came 36,000,000*l.* of gold, and in five years 150,000,000*l.* were poured into Europe. The effect of this was that prices were raised immensely. But a marvellous thing occurred also shortly after. There was a Commission of all the great States of Europe, who took advantage of the holding of the Exhibition at Paris to meet there, with the consent of their Governments, to consider whether a uniform system of coinage could not be established in the world; and they came to a resolution that a uniform system could be established, and that advantage ought to be taken of the gold discoveries to bring about this result.

Whatever may have been the exact circumstances of the case which was in the result such as I have indicated, the Government of Germany, which had 80,000,000*l.* of silver, availed themselves of the great change of which I am speaking, to substitute gold for their 80,000,000*l.* of silver; France resolved that her bi-metallic currency should, if possible, be replaced by entirely a gold currency; and the example of those two countries was followed by Holland and the smaller States of Europe; and the great process of converting silver into gold currency continued. These vast changes have been going on for ten years; and we cannot, therefore, be surprised at the revolution which has occurred in the price of silver, when both France and Germany, the one with 60,000,000*l.* and the other with 80,000,000*l.* of silver, were anxious to avail themselves of the change which has occurred, and to substitute a gold currency. All this time the produce of the gold mines in Australia and California has been regularly diminishing; and the consequence is that, while these large alterations of currency in favour of a gold currency have been taking place in the leading countries of Europe—notwithstanding an increase of population, which alone requires always a considerable increase of gold

currency to carry on its transactions—the amount every year has diminished and is diminishing, until a state of affairs has been brought about by the gold discoveries, exactly the reverse of those they produced at first. Gold is every day appreciating in value, and as it appreciates in value, the lower become prices. This, then, I think, is the third cause—not dogmatically stated, but only with that diffidence which becomes one who has to speak on an abstruse and complicated subject—which, I think, earnestly requires the consideration of your lordships, and which may lead to consequences which may be of a very serious character.

Now, my lords, I do not wish to speak at too much length on this subject. I have noticed, on the part of the Government, a series of causes which, I think, have led to the present most unsatisfactory state of the public fortunes. The greatest sufferers at this moment, undoubtedly, are the cultivators of the soil and the farming class. They are a class who, if you look to the amount of labour they employ, if you look to their general character, their connection with local interests, and a variety of other considerations, must ever be deeply valued by those who value the order of society, and, I will say, even the freedom of this country. There is no other country in which we find an identical class such as the British farmer; and, whatever may be the consequences of our legislation that is past, if it should be the disappearance or a great diminution of the influence and numbers of that class, it would be a political injury which never could be compensated for by any fiscal or financial results. I am sure your lordships will sympathise with that class. You are deeply connected with the land. You know well all shades of rural life—you have lived among these men; and I feel confident that the sympathy you express is as cordial and as profound as can animate the breast of man. But, my lords, do not let us be afraid of telling them at this moment that, while we deeply sympathise with them—that while we will lose no opportunity that we can use of legitimately assisting them in the hard trials which they have to encounter—there is nothing, in my mind, which would be a more bitter mockery than to pretend by some small adjustment of local taxation

that we can offer them a remedy for the distress which is produced by such vast, such numerous, and such complicated causes. If there is anything in the state of our system of taxation which acts unfairly to the British farmer, I cannot doubt that Parliament—that both parties in the State—will be prepared and even eager to remedy it. We have shown that before by the series of relief that we have given him.

When an honourable gentleman in the other House, a county member (Sir Massey Lopes), carried a resolution that it became the duty of the Government to revise the local taxation of the country, and relieve real property—including land, of course, as one of the most important portions of real property—from unjust burdens, he was asked to define what were the burdens which he thought were so peculiar and unjust; and it was then that he said the rates on Government property ought to be assessed as on all other property; that the care of pauper lunatics should fall on the State; that the registration of births, deaths, &c., should no longer be supplied by local taxation; that the metropolitan police should be supported out of the Consolidated Fund; that the police of the counties and boroughs of Great Britain—omitting Ireland, because that was already supplied—should be borne upon the Consolidated Fund; that local prisons should be equally sustained by the general revenue of the country; and so on. That was a definition of the practical claims which were then preferred, and which were sanctioned by a majority of 100 in the House. My lords, from every one of those items during the last five years real property has been relieved, and every one of those burdens has been assisted from the Consolidated Fund. Of these things the noble marquis has omitted to tell us.



AGRICULTURAL DISTRESS, April 29, 1879.<sup>1</sup>

[The second of the two speeches was in answer to Lord Bate-  
man, who moved :—

‘1. That, this House fully recognising the benefits which would result to the community if a system of real free trade were universally adopted, it is expedient in all future commercial negotiations with other countries to advocate a policy of Reciprocity between all inter-trading nations; and

‘2. That the long-continued depressed state of the commercial, manufacturing, and agricultural interests should form the subject of a full Parliamentary inquiry with the view of ascertaining the causes, the best means of redress, and of counteracting the injurious effects of the excessive tariffs levied by foreign nations against the produce and manufactures of this country.’]

MY lords, it cannot be denied that a state of great national prosperity is quite consistent and compatible with legislation in favour of the protection of native industry. That proposition, years ago, was denied; but viewing the position of things around us, with the experience we have had of France and the United States of America—the two most flourishing communities probably in existence—it cannot for a moment be maintained that the existence of a protective system to the industry of an ancient country is inconsistent with a flourishing condition. Well, my lords, many years ago—nearly forty—this country, which no one can say for a moment did not flourish under the old system of protection, deemed it necessary to revise the principles upon which its commerce was conducted. There were three courses—to use a Parliamentary phrase common to those times—which were then open to the eminent man to whom it fell to solve this problem. Sir Robert Peel might,

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

in the first place, have reconstructed our commercial system on a scale of low duties, but applied generally to every item in the tariff. In the second place, he might have endeavoured to reconstruct our commercial system by those commercial treaties of which we have heard so much to-night. And, lastly, it lay before him to take a third course, which was at once to determine to fight hostile tariffs with free imports. It is impossible to say what may have been the reasons that ultimately induced that great statesman to take the course which he pursued. I dare say, if we knew it, it probably was that the difficulties of the two other courses, with our complicated Parliamentary system, were such that it was impossible to carry them through—that he could not found a system upon a scheme of small and universal duties, and that the attempt to negotiate commercial treaties upon the scale and in the number that were requisite was not possible at that particular time, and with the passionate feelings which the changes then proposed would naturally excite.

The scheme that was adopted was this—that we were to fight hostile tariffs with free imports. I was among those who looked upon that policy with fear—I believed it to be one very perilous; and these feelings were shared by numerous parties in both Houses of Parliament and by a numerous and influential party in the country. The decision of England on the question was a decision which was not hurried. Opportunity was offered to discuss it; a whole session of Parliament was devoted to it, before the Bill which commenced and, I may say, was the crown of the system, the repeal of the Corn Laws, was carried. After that, two or three years passed when the country experienced great distress in its industry—a distress perhaps not inferior to that it is now going through. There was, of course, much discontent. There was, on the part of those who had opposed the recent change, an earnest and anxious desire naturally to avail themselves of this sharp experience of the country, and obtain a reversal of the policy which, in their opinion, had produced these evils—but which were naturally not produced by the commercial changes of that day, for sufficient time had not elapsed after they had been carried to have produced the evils

which were then suffered by the country. The question of free trade was again discussed in both Houses of Parliament. It enlisted the abilities of leading men on both sides. It was put before the country by the Press in all its forms. A dissolution of Parliament then occurred. At the very time when there was great public distress the country had thus the opportunity of rescinding the national resolution on which the new system was based—and the country refrained from taking that opportunity to pass a verdict which would have forced a reconsideration of the new commercial policy.

Many of your lordships must know, from your own individual experience, that under these circumstances it was impossible for public men, whatever might have been their opinions upon these great commercial questions when these important changes were first introduced, to have had an open controversy for a quarter of a century. The Government of the country could not have been carried on. It was necessary to bow to the decision of Parliament and the country, expressed by its representatives in both Houses, and ultimately by an appeal to the whole nation itself. That has been the state of affairs as regards the two great parties in the State, however they may have differed originally upon this subject. We have watched, not without anxiety, all that has occurred during this long period; we have modified our opinions with great precaution; we have felt the great sacrifices that were to be made, for the sake of the country, to the expression of the sentiments of the majority. We have not been unaware of the remarkable circumstances, such as the gold discoveries and others, that happened, which could not have been taken into calculation either by those who proposed or those who opposed the great commercial change. The country is now in a state of much suffering and some perplexity; and it is not unnatural your lordships should be asked to consider whether the principles upon which for the last thirty-five years we have acted are really sound and true. The question has been brought before us by my noble friend (Lord Bateman), who for some time has given his attention to the subject. My noble friend read to us some extracts from a pamphlet he has written. We know he has

been in active communication with experienced persons who are suffering in the present state of the country. Though I cannot agree that my noble friend addressed us—as I fear I shall have to show—in a manner amounting to logical conviction, he at least showed us by the manner in which he treated the subject generally that it was one with which he was familiar and on which he was perfectly justified in putting his opinions before the House. I regret to say that with most of his statements I cannot agree. I was very much struck by the course my noble friend took. I listened to him with an attention which I am sure was not surpassed by any of your lordships. My noble friend took an early opportunity of saying that he was in favour of the repeal of the Corn Laws, and nothing would induce him to agree to any recurrence to our old legislation upon the subject. This statement did not seem to be endorsed by the recent remarks of the noble duke (the Duke of Rutland), who seemed to look forward to the placing of an import duty on corn as one of the measures which might extricate us from our present difficulty and perplexity.

The noble lord who has devoted himself to this subject commenced his speech with the most formal declaration that, whatever relief might be devised for the suffering classes and trades of this country, the landowner and the farmer are to have no share in the solace and assistance which are to be found in a duty upon corn. My noble friend proceeded to state that he was entirely opposed to all duties that were levied for revenue, provided that they concerned the food and sustenance of the people; and he gave us one example—one of a group—sufficient in itself, the duty on tea. That, he said, is quite indefensible—why not repeal the duty on tea and put it on spirits? Four millions is a sum which I believe the most sanguine Chancellor of the Exchequer would hardly anticipate that he could raise by an increase of duties on spirits—particularly at this moment, as it is a declining revenue. My noble friend asked why a duty on tea should be defensible if a duty on corn of the same amount was not? I remind him that by his own position the duty on tea is a duty for revenue, and a duty of the same amount on corn would be a duty for protection.

Having told us that he will not bring back the corn duties; that he is prepared to put an end to all duties for revenue; and then having denounced commercial treaties because he considered we have nothing to offer, and we never get anything by them; and having concluded that it is not by any of these the country can be saved, the noble lord said it could be saved only by the principle of reciprocity. Your lordships must have hung upon the accents of the noble lord when he promised to tell us what reciprocity is. At one moment I thought we were to be enlightened on the subject. He gave a picturesque description of a person who had crossed his path in these investigations—he had probably lost his way—the opportunity seemed to have arrived; but it passed and never recurred again.

So far as I understand him, reciprocity is barter. I have always understood that barter was the first evidence of civilisation—that it was exactly the state of human exchange that separated civilisation from savagery; and if reciprocity is only barter, I fear that would hardly help us out of our difficulty. My noble friend read some extracts from the speeches of those who had the misfortune to be in Parliament at that time, and he honoured me by reading an extract from the speech I then made in the other House of Parliament. That was a speech in favour of reciprocity—a speech which defined what was then thought to be reciprocity, and indicated the means by which reciprocity could be obtained. I do not want to enter into the discussion whether the principle was right or wrong—but it was acknowledged in public life, favoured and pursued by many statesmen who conceived that by the negotiation of a treaty of commerce, by reciprocal exchange and the lowering of duties, the products of the two negotiating countries would find a freer access and consumption in the two countries than they formerly possessed. But when my noble friend taunts me with a quotation of some rusty phrases of mine forty years ago, I must remind him that we had elements then on which treaties of reciprocity could be negotiated. At that time, although the great changes of Sir Robert Peel had taken place, there were 168 articles in the tariff which were materials by which you could have negotiated, if that was a wise and desirable policy,

commercial treaties of reciprocity. What is the number you now have in the tariff? Twenty-two. Those who talk of negotiating treaties of reciprocity—have they the materials for negotiating treaties of reciprocity? You have lost the opportunity. I do not want to enter into the argument, at the present moment, whether this was wise or not; but the policy which was long ago abandoned you cannot now resume.

You have at this moment a great number of commercial treaties. I will not charge my memory with stating the exact number of commercial treaties we have, they are very numerous; but this I know: you have nearly forty commercial treaties with some of the most considerable countries in the world—the United States, Germany, and others—in which ‘the most favoured nation clause’ is included. Well, suppose you are for a system of reciprocity, as my noble friend proposes. He enters into negotiations with a State; he says: ‘You complain of our high duties on some particular articles. We have not many, we have a few left; we shall make some great sacrifice to induce you to enter into a treaty for an exchange of products.’ But the moment you contemplate agreeing with the State that you will make concessions by lowering some duties on the few articles remaining, every other of the forty States with ‘the most favoured nation clause’ claims exactly the same privilege. The fact is, practically speaking, reciprocity, whatever its merits, is dead. You cannot, if you would, build up a reciprocal system of commercial treaties. You have lost the power; you have given up the means by which you could before obtain such a result as my noble friend desires. But he has no other scheme to put before us but the scheme of reciprocity, which I wish to show your lordships does not exist. The noble lord sneered at our last treaty with Servia. It secures us the advantage of ‘the most favoured nation clause.’ The noble earl who last addressed us (the Earl of Morley) showed, according to his views, the fallacy of the principle of commercial reciprocity. I do not want to get into that part of the case. I hold myself free on that subject. But here it is a phantom. There are no means, and no men—from whatever side the Government of the country may be drawn, whatever members may form it—who can

come forward now with a large system of commercial exchange founded on the system of reciprocity. The opportunity, like the means, has been relinquished; and if this is the only mode in which we are to extricate ourselves from the great distress which prevails, our situation is hopeless. I should be very sorry to say, whatever the condition of the country, its condition is hopeless. I have had the opportunity, and it was my duty, during the last six months to investigate the real condition of some of the principal industries of this country, and I cannot trace to our great commercial changes any of the depression and evils which they experience and complain of—except, I admit, in the case of land.

I cannot for a moment doubt that the repeal of the Corn Laws—on the policy of which I do not enter—has materially affected the condition of those who are interested in land. I do not mean to say that this is the only cause of landed distress. There are other reasons—general distress, the metallic changes, have all had an effect; but I cannot shut my eyes to the conviction that the termination of protection to the landed interest has materially tended to the condition in which it finds itself. But that is no reason why we should come suddenly to an opinion that we should retrace our steps, and authorise and sanction any violent changes. This state of affairs is one which has long threatened—it has been contemplated by many high authorities. It has arrived. I cannot shut my eyes to the fact, and we must consider every step we take with reference to it. I cannot give up the expectation that the energy of this country will bring about a condition of affairs more favourable to the various classes which form the great landed interest of this country. I should look upon it as a great misfortune to this country that the character, and power, and influence of the landed interest and its valuable industry should be diminished, and should experience anything like a fatal and final blow. It would in my opinion, be a misfortune, not to this country alone, but to the world, for it has contributed to the spirit of liberty and order more than any other class that has existed in modern times.

My lords, I have put before you the remarks that have oc-

curred to me on the motion of my noble friend. He has got hold of a very good question in the national distress; but it appears to me that before he proceeds in his adventure of finding the remedy for it, it is absolutely necessary that he should study more precision, both of thought and language. I listened with much attention to his agreeable speech; but I really do not know what he requires. He is against protection. I understand the views of my noble friend the noble duke (the Duke of Rutland). They are consistent. They are the same he expressed when seated on my right hand, forty years ago, and he is still ready to act upon them. He is prepared to propose and carry out, if he can, a certain degree of protection to the land. But my noble friend who asks us to pass this resolution utterly disclaims that; he utterly disclaims everything but a phantom. I cannot support my noble friend when he asks us to pass resolutions of this grave character, and when he himself disclaims the very grounds on which he might have framed, not what I think was a correct, but a plausible case. It is a very unwise course, in my opinion, when the country is not in a state so satisfactory as we could wish, when all classes, no doubt, of the industry of the country are in a position of uneasiness—it is, in my opinion, an unwise course to propose any inquiry which has not either some definite object, or is likely to lead to some action on the part of those who bring it forward. I think it would be most unwise for us to come to a resolution to have an inquiry into the causes of public distress when that inquiry is evidently one which would end only in asking questions. It would lead to great disappointment and uneasiness on the part of the country; and the classes who are trying to realise the exact difficulties they have to encounter, and devising the best means to overpower and change them, would relapse into a lax state which might render them incapable of making the exertions it is necessary for them to make. Therefore, I cannot sanction, so far as my vote is concerned, the course recommended by my noble friend.

Looking into the state of the country, I do not see there is any great mystery in the causes which have produced a state of which there is undoubted general complaint. What has hap-

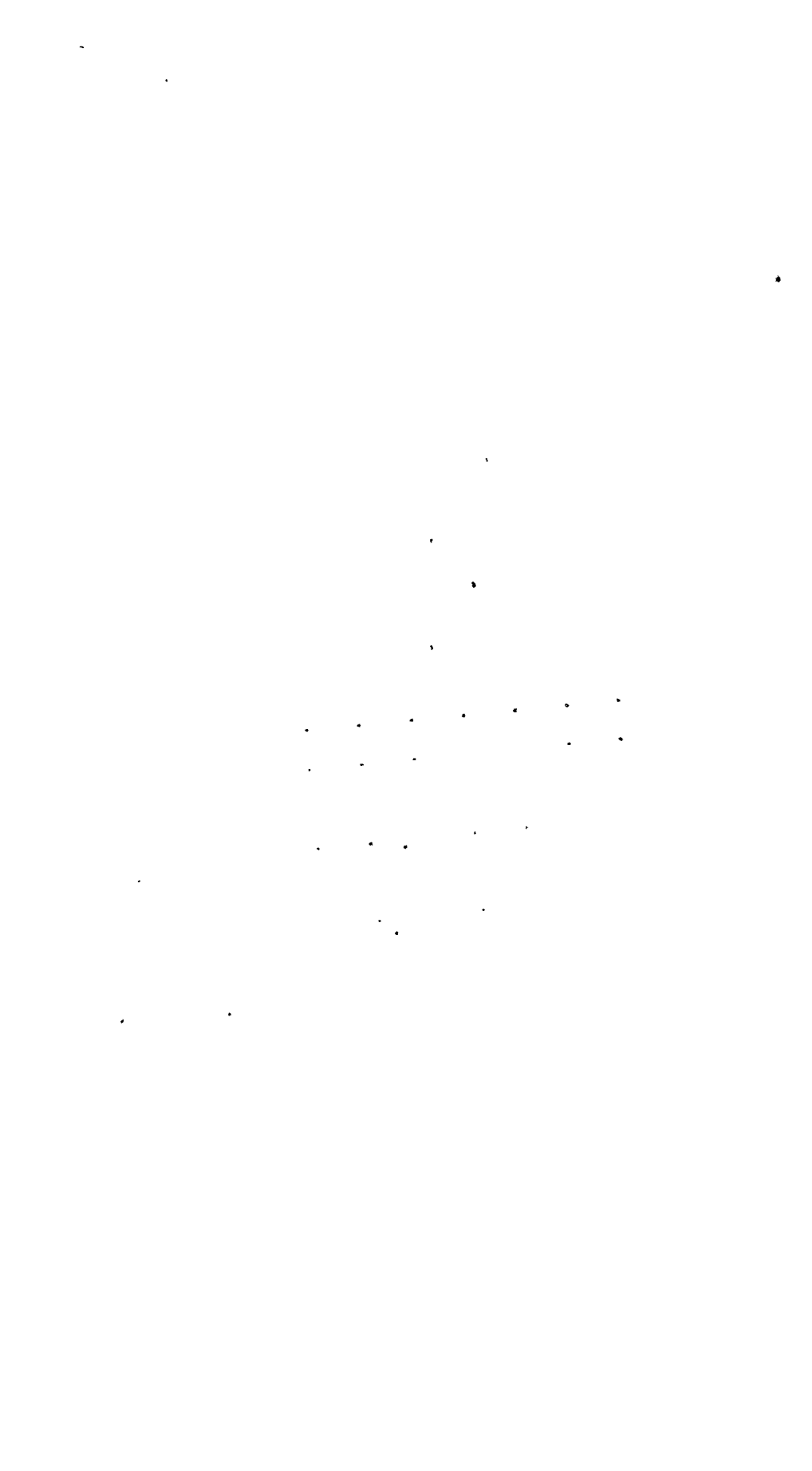


pened in our own commercial fortunes during the last ten years will explain it. The great collapse which naturally followed the convulsion of prosperity which seemed to deluge the world, and not merely this country—the fact that other countries have been placed in an equally disagreeable situation, though their commercial systems were founded upon principles the contrary of our own—these are circumstances which appear to me to render it quite unnecessary to enter into an inquiry on this subject. I do not mean to say that there are not moments—that there are not circumstances—in which an inquiry by Parliament or by a Royal Commission into the causes of national distress may not be allowable—may not be necessary; but it must be a distress of a very different kind from that which we are now experiencing. We must have the consciousness that the great body of the people are in a situation intolerable to them, and that no persons with any sense of responsibility would think they had done their duty without examining and reporting on the causes of it. That is not the condition of the people. That there is great suffering—that the leading personages of all classes are suffering—I admit; but the bulk of the people are in a condition which everyone must acknowledge it would be absurd to describe as one of distress and despair. I hope myself, and firmly believe, although I know that many of great authority in this matter are sceptical—I believe that there is a change for the better in the condition of the industrial world; and though, after what has been said to-night, I do not care again to talk about America, much that I hear from America confirms that belief. I am sure there will be no want of sympathy in this House with the sufferings of the people of this country; and if to-night your lordships do not accept the proposition of my noble friend, it is because—and the country will understand what is meant—it is because it is a proposition which can lead to no public benefit.

PART III.  
*LATER FINANCIAL SPEECHES.*

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BUDGET . . . . .	DEC. 3, 1852.
REPLY . . . . .	DEC. 16, 1852.
SPEECH ON GLADSTONE'S BUDGET	MAY 2, 1853.
BUDGET . . . . .	APRIL 19, 1858.
ON MR. DUCANE'S MOTION . .	FEB. 24, 1860.
WAYS AND MEANS . . . .	APRIL 7, 1862.
COMMERCIAL TREATY WITH ITALY	FEB. 17, 1863.



BUDGET, December 3, 1852.<sup>1</sup>

[The principal features of this Budget were the remission of half the malt-tax; the gradual remission of half the tea-duty; the assessment of income-tax on one third of the farmer's rental instead of one half; the extension of income-tax to incomes of 100*l.* a year of precarious income, and to 50*l.* a year of permanent income; the extension of the house-tax to houses of 10*l.* a year rateable value, and an increase of the assessment to 1*s.* 6*d.* in the pound on houses and 1*s.* on shops; the whole produce being calculated at 1,723,000*l.* It is easy to see that these proposals were not likely to command the assent of the new House of Commons, in which the majority was hostile to the claims of the agricultural interest. But it may not be so generally understood why the Chancellor of the Exchequer was obliged to introduce them. In the autumn of 1852, the agricultural depression of the last three years, though diminishing, had not entirely disappeared. The Opposition perceived that if the Chancellor could be forced to make his financial statement before the expiration of the year, instead of waiting until the usual time in the spring of 1853, it would be morally impossible for him not to propose something for the farmer which, in all probability, they would be able to use against him. What they foresaw came to pass. Being compelled to make his statement in December, instead of in the following April, the reduction of the malt-tax and the alteration in the assessment of the income-tax on agricultural incomes were forced upon him: and to compensate for these remissions he was compelled to resort to the unpopular provisions above mentioned—the extension, namely, of the house-tax and the income-tax. Four months later he would have been relieved from this necessity. But his opponents were aware of the fact, and forced his hand, as we have seen. The Government were defeated, on December 16, by a majority of 19, and were succeeded by the Aberdeen administration.

After commenting on three separate instances of particular inter-

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

ests which had suffered from recent legislation—the shipping interest, the sugar colonies, and the classes affected by local taxation—Mr. Disraeli proceeded as follows :—]

I HAVE now, Sir, considered three instances of peculiar interests that have, in my opinion, suffered by recent legislation. I have placed before the House the general views of Her Majesty's Government with respect to those interests. I have offered, with regard to the shipping interest, measures which, so far as I could judge of the feelings of the House, were, I think, considered moderate but satisfactory. I mean moderate so far in their conception that they have not been framed with an *ad captandum* purpose; satisfactory, because I believe this House and the country will take them as a final settlement to that controversy. I have endeavoured, on the part of the Government, to view the claims of the sugar colonies in a just and fair spirit. I am sure that those who are connected with that interest must be satisfied that it would be quite impossible to propose a differential duty; and that claim could only have been urged by those who were not masters of the facts; and they must see from the course taken on the part of the Government as to encouraging immigration to the colonies, and permitting them to carry on the manufacturing processes without the restrictions which before existed—a boon which has been described to me by an eminent member of the West India body as equal itself to a differential duty of 1*s.* 6*d.* per. cwt.—they must feel, when the Government have taken upon themselves the responsibility—for it is a grave responsibility—of recommending that step, besides others to which I shall have to advert, having the same object in view, that there has been an anxious desire on our part to place them in as good a position as present circumstances and the temper of the public mind would permit. I believe, Sir, that the measures we have recommended with respect to the West India body will sensibly improve the condition of that interest. I shall not touch any further upon the subject of local taxation.

I now approach the more important topic of viewing the taxation of this country under the new circumstances in which

all parties and conditions of men have now agreed they are to be placed. So long as there were two great parties in this country who questioned the principle upon which our commercial code ought to be established, it was impossible to obtain any general adhesion to the principle upon which our financial policy ought to be constructed. So long as a man thought that his industry ought to be protected, he was prepared to endure a heavy burden of taxation artificially distributed. So long as a man thought that his industry should be free from all restriction, of course he demurred against the system which imposed restriction upon the financial arrangements of the country and raised the prices of the articles which he consumed. It is obvious, generally speaking, that the doctrine of unrestricted competition is not consistent with restricted industry—in a word, if you decree that the community are to receive low prices for their produce, your policy ought to be one which will put an end, as soon as possible, to high taxes. Well, Sir, after the general election, and after the solemn verdict of the country, we had to consider the general system of our taxation, and to apply to it the principle of unrestricted competition. We had to ask ourselves what were the measures which it was best to recommend to Parliament, now that this principle was formally and definitely established, and what were the measures most consistent with that principle, and which would enable the community to encounter that competition which it must now, in every form and in every sense, be prepared to meet? Well, Sir, when we took that subject into consideration, giving it the utmost thought we could command, it appeared to me that we must arrive inevitably at this result—that we should best enable the people to engage in that competition to which they are now for ever destined by cheapening as much as possible that which sustains their lives. We look, therefore, to articles that are of prime necessity, and if we find that those articles of prime necessity are subjected to some of the heaviest taxes in our tariff, then we say that these are arrangements inconsistent with the new system established, and the new principles of which we have approved.

It is the boast of the honourable gentlemen opposite that

they have given cheap bread to the community ; but the principles upon which you have given cheap bread to the community are principles which ought to make you cheapen the sustenance of the community in every form ; and I think I shall be able to show to the House that if they adopt that principle of finance, they will, in a legitimate manner, without going out of their way, and without artificial means, be giving the greatest possible impulse to every branch of industry of the country, and especially to those very branches that have most suffered by recent legislation. The House, therefore, will not be astonished that Her Majesty's Government are prepared to recommend to Parliament to deal with the malt-tax. Here is a prime necessity of life subject to a very high tax, and a very high tax levied under circumstances which greatly restrict industry. I am not called upon to recommend the change I am about to propose to the House to honourable gentlemen opposite on any other plea than that which they have always declared to be the sovereign plea—namely, the benefit of the consumer. Honourable gentlemen opposite have sometimes told friends of mine, when they have proposed dealing with the malt-tax as a means of assisting the agricultural interest, that it was only a consumer's tax ; but I am sure honourable gentlemen opposite will not oppose the plan of the Government on that plea—that they will not get up and tell me I am about to propose a change in the law which will only benefit the consumer. It can hardly be the effect of the dissolution of Parliament, it will hardly be the effect of the triumph of unrestricted competition, that I am to be told by honourable gentlemen opposite, on the first occasion when I propose a remission of a tax, that it can only benefit the consumer. On the contrary, I give honourable gentlemen opposite credit for the consistent and sincere conviction that the interest of the consumer is the interest which we ought first to consider. I have never disguised my own opinions on this subject. I have always told my friends that though it was certainly the interest of the consumer that the malt-tax should be dealt with, still it was my opinion that there was no tax with which we could deal which, if properly dealt with, would more benefit the agricultural interest. I

hope honourable gentlemen opposite will not grudge me a few observations on this view of the question to those with whom I have so long been in connection.

It appears to me that the question of the malt-tax has assumed a totally different aspect since the repeal of the Corn Laws. I know it was said by one who was justly of great authority in this House—one of very great authority with me—that the moment you repealed the Corn Laws the repeal of the malt-tax was inevitable; and, Sir, I think there will be no great difficulty in demonstrating the soundness of that opinion. But it is quite clear, when ministers of the State take every opportunity of informing the cultivator of the soil that he must grow as little wheat as possible, that the difficulty of maintaining the policy of a law which restricts the production of the next generous grain is proportionately increased. There is no doubt, when the tendency of your recent legislation is to diminish the production of wheat, and, in fact, to limit its production to those soils only which are eminently and naturally qualified for it, that the tendency of your legislation should be, if not to encourage those productions which should be natural to the soil, now that wheat is to be relinquished, at least not to maintain laws which would discourage the production of them. Even as regards wheat, it is impossible that any legislative means can be devised which would more tend to the encouragement and support of the wheat land than, in fact, diverting those soils that were improperly employed in the cultivation of wheat back to their original purpose. The more you produce barley upon the soils qualified to produce barley, the more you are improving the market for the production of those soils eminently qualified to give us wheat; and the indirect influence of any change in the malt-tax upon the production of wheat will be, in my opinion, very considerable. Well, Sir, we now have to consider, in the first place, how we shall deal with this tax, in what manner, and to what degree. If we deal with it in a small manner, we shall probably accomplish none of those objects to which I have alluded. The consumer will not be benefited; the cultivator of the soil will not be benefited; you'll neither have cheap beer nor will you have



a freer cultivation of the land of the country. What you want is, that you shall have as much as possible unrestricted industry, and its consequences, as far as the cultivation of the soil is concerned; and that one of the consequences of that unrestricted industry should be that the consumer should be enabled to procure one of the main causes of his expenditure, and one of the principal sources of his health and strength, supplied to him at a reduced price. Those are the objects we wish to obtain, and they appear to us to be the objects which cannot be obtained if we deal in a small manner with this great subject. The existing duty upon malt is 2s. 7½*d.*, and 5 per cent. on the bushel. The consumption is increasing. In 1849 it was 38,935,000 bushels; in 1850 it was 40,744,000; and in 1851 it went a little back, and was 40,377,000 bushels. But though increasing, there is no article of consumption which has less proportionately increased, and the diminution of the consumption of which can, I think, be more clearly attributed to the large tax levied on it, and to the restrictions which that tax occasions.

I know there are gentlemen who have endeavoured to maintain at times that the reason the consumption of malt has not increased to a greater extent is that the taste of the country has been diverted to other sources of sustenance and excitement; but I think I could show to the House, by a reference to a few general statistics upon these subjects, that that is a position which cannot be maintained. Well, Sir, under these circumstances Her Majesty's Government think it their duty to recommend to the House that the malt-tax should be considerably diminished—that we should diminish by one-half the amount of the present duty on malt. The sum which we have to deal with is a sum which exceeds 5,000,000*l.* as regards the revenue, and we propose that we shall diminish the duty exactly by one-half; we propose that there should be paid a uniform duty of 1s. 3½*d.* and 5 per cent. per bushel upon barley, and also upon every bushel of bere and bigg; we propose to terminate the restrictions and the difference in the duty which has been injuriously and improperly maintained between malt raised from barley and from bere and bigg; and we pro-

pose also to do away with the drawback in Scotland upon spirits produced from malt. That drawback has already been renounced by Ireland as unnecessary. It was recommended by the Commissioners of Excise Inquiry as one which shall be terminated whenever any considerable reduction took place in the duty upon malt; and I think I shall have no difficulty in showing to the House, when we come to points of detail, that this is a change which ought no longer to be postponed. Now, allow me to read to the House the recommendation which was made, in the year 1831, I think, upon the subject of the malt-duty, by a distinguished member of this House, Sir Henry Parnell, who was at the head of the Royal Commission to inquire into the Excise, and to whose labours we are indebted for some of the most valuable documents in our Parliamentary library. Now, these words are very interesting when we remember the circumstances under which they were written. Having entered into a general statement that the most effectual mode of suppressing illicit malting would be by a reduction of the duty on malt, he went on as follows:—

‘But if the importation of foreign barley be not permitted, the tendency of a reduced duty to increase the consumption of malt would be counteracted by the price of British barley becoming higher in consequence of the new demand for it, which would arise from the duty having been lowered; and thus the consequence of a reduction of duty would be, not such an increased consumption of malt as would keep the revenue up to its present amount, but a higher price of barley, and a certain loss of revenue. As, therefore, there is no probability of a reduced duty being followed by such an increased consumption of malt as would prevent a loss of revenue, so long as the importation of foreign barley is restricted, we are of opinion that it will be preferable to endeavour to check illicit malting by the enforcement of the excise laws, however inadequate they may be to produce a complete remedy, rather than to try the experiment of stopping it by a reduction of duty. If there were no factitious cause for elevating the price of barley, arising from the direct effect of a duty on foreign barley, or from the indirect effect of duties on other kinds of foreign corn, we

should not feel any hesitation in saying that the proper way of dealing with the malt-duty would be to reduce it one-half.'

Those were the words of Sir Henry Parnell. Practically, he said that, if your Corn Laws were repealed, he recommended you to reduce your malt-duty one-half. That, too, is the opinion of a gentleman as tender of the revenue as any gentleman who ever spoke in this House. Those circumstances, which Sir Henry Parnell possibly did not contemplate, have occurred; you have repealed your Corn Laws, and I ask you now to sanction the recommendation made by Sir Henry Parnell at that time. For, says he—

'Nothing in our opinion can be more unwise than to reduce duties on articles which are fit subjects of taxation, without at the same time taking care to secure the most abundant supply that is possible to be secured of the materials which are necessary for their production.'

Well, you have done that. The circumstances which he anticipated have occurred, and now I ask you to adopt the measure which he recommended.

Mr. Cayley: Is that the Report of the commissioners that you have quoted from?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer: Yes; the Report of the Commissioners of Excise Inquiry, of which Sir H. Parnell was the chairman. The Report of the commissioners also recommended terminating the drawback on spirits made from malt in Scotland. That is at present 8*l.* per gallon; and, of course, if there were a reduction of the duty by one-half, it would only be 4*l.* per gallon. But here is the Report of the Committee on the Spirit Duties in Ireland:

'That it is the opinion of this Committee that the repeal of the malt drawback in Ireland will not be prejudicial either to the trade in spirits, or to the revenue, in that country.'

That was in 1842. In consequence of that, the drawback in Ireland terminated without a murmur. It has given great satisfaction, and I am certain that the repeal of the drawback in Scotland will prove equally successful. There are many points in the Report of the Commissioners of Excise Inquiry as regards malt which are well worthy of the consideration of

the House. They particularly dilate on the length of credit which is given in that trade. They show the vicious principle on which that system has been established ; and they recommend that the credit should be limited to the same duration which applies to all other exciseable articles. I confess I am not prepared to give unqualified adhesion to that recommendation. I think it is of the greatest importance that in all these changes the particular trades involved should be disturbed as little as possible ; and, though I think that the principles laid down in that report are sound principles, and that ultimately we should look as much as possible in this country to diminish the system of long credits, which is not adapted to the principle on which our commerce is conducted at present, but which was the result, I think, of paper currency and war speculations—still at the same time I think it would not be wise unqualifiedly and entirely to adopt the recommendation of the commissioners in this respect. We propose, then, that on October 10 next the malt-duty shall be reduced one-half. We have fixed on that period, of course, after due examination into the question when the change could take place with the least inconvenience to the trade, and, as we believe, with the most general benefit to the community, and October 10 is the day on which we have fixed. On that day we propose to take the stock-in-hand throughout the country, and of course we shall guard those who are then possessors of malt from the competition, so far as the one-half in the amount of the duty is concerned, to which they will be subjected, and for that stock-in-hand they will receive a drawback in proportion to the reduction of the duty.

I do not know that this is the convenient moment at which I should attempt to place before the House the effect of these changes upon the revenue. It will probably be more convenient that at a subsequent part of my statement I should place the effect of those changes before the House. I will, then, once more, merely capitulate, for the sake of clearness, what this change is. We propose to reduce the duty on malt one-half ; we propose that there shall be no difference between the duty on malt raised from barley and from bere and bigg. This will occasion some accession to the revenue, though it is not

for that object, but in order to simplify the subject as much as possible, that I recommend it to the House. We propose to put an end to the drawback allowed in Scotland on spirits raised from malt; and we propose that the reduction shall take place on October 10 next, on which day the whole stock-in-hand throughout the country will be taken, and a drawback allowed to the holders of that stock proportionate in amount to the reduction of the duty.

Well, Sir, following the principle which I have laid down, that in the present state of affairs we should consider our taxation mainly as it regards the great body of the consumers, believing that the policy will afford the most legitimate, the surest, and the most efficient means of relieving the industry of the country, I proceed now to another branch of the question. I have shown you by the manner in which we propose to deal with the malt-tax we benefit largely, as we believe, the consumer; but in doing so we think that incidentally—and that was only a secondary purpose—we are giving most efficient aid to the agricultural interest, far beyond what dealing with local taxation would give. Now, Sir, I come to another branch of the subject. I come to deal with an article as popular with the people as malt, as much a necessary of life, and subjected to a much heavier tax. I am about to recommend the House to deal with the tea-duties. Sir, I know the prejudices that exist among a certain class of persons on the subject of the tea-duties; but having had occasion to look very much into this question, I have been amused in marking the rise of opinion—the gradual formation of opinion—on this article of produce, now almost one of paramount interest in this country. I hardly know anything more diverting than to open ‘Pepys’s Diary,’ where we see it stated, ‘Took a cup of the new China drink—very pleasant,’ and to remember that not two centuries have passed, and the exotic novelty that pleased one evening that fantastic gentleman is now the principal solace of every cottage in the kingdom.

Well, Sir, the great objection which has been urged at different times and by persons in authority—for I think it right to state a case of this kind as fairly as possible—is, that in dealing

with tea we deal with an article of limited production. True it is that since Mr. Pepys had his cup of the 'new China drink'—true it is that since certainly the commencement of the last century, when only 500,000 lbs. of tea were imported into this country at a very high price, we have ended in importing more than 70,000,000 lbs. in one year, and every year at a cheaper rate. These would seem to be facts in the face of which it is very difficult to believe that the production of tea can be limited. A production so immensely increased, and always imported at a lower price, appears to be one the supply of which cannot be likely to fail. But in the year 1834, I think, or shortly after the passing of the Reform Bill, when the trade with China was opened—when the charter of the East India Company was about to be, or had become, matter for discussion—it was always urged by persons of authority against opening the trade with China, that we should be greatly disappointed in what would occur, because, the supply of tea being limited, it was quite impossible that there could be any reduction in the price. The supply of tea was then, I think, about 30,000,000 lbs. per annum. Now we have, last year, imported the unprecedented amount of 71,466,000 lbs.,<sup>1</sup> our consumption being, in round numbers, 54,000,000 lbs. It is quite clear, therefore, that the importation of tea is still greater than our consumption, and it is also quite clear that the duties which exist, which are nearly 240 per cent. per pound, check a consumption equal to the importation. Well, Sir, when we look at the gradual increase in the importation of tea; when we look to the broad fact that 30,000,000 lbs. under the restricted trade have increased to 71,466,000 lbs. under the freer trade, though subjected to a colossal duty; when we look to all the evidence before us, and to the gradual diminution always of price, we have a right, I think, *primâ facie* to conclude that there will be no difficulty in supplying the demand for tea in this country. But, Sir, Her Majesty's Government, in dealing with this important subject have not deemed it consistent with their duty merely to depend upon their own conclusions, framed from books and

<sup>1</sup> The quantity of tea imported in 1880 was 206,971,570 lbs.; and the quantity retained for home consumption 158,321,572 lbs.

their observations of what occurs around them. They have had an opportunity of consulting those who are great authorities on the subject, who, by their foreign residence, their particular study of the matter in question, and their natural aptitude to form conclusions upon such subjects, should be entitled to guide the judgment of any administration. They have applied to those who, locally, were the best capable of forming an opinion—though, of course, to form any opinion on a subject in a country like China is much more difficult than in other countries: nevertheless, we have now some knowledge of China; nevertheless, there are individuals who are very competent to guide even a Government on such subjects; and after bestowing upon this question the most laborious investigation, and having omitted no efforts to obtain the most accurate information; having suggested every means and every test by which information could be brought to bear; having even personally had the honour and satisfaction of conferring with some peculiarly qualified to offer an opinion on the subject, Her Majesty's Government have arrived at the conclusion which, to use the most moderate language I can command, may be thus expressed—that there can be no prospect of any want of a supply of tea to this country.

It is under these circumstances, Sir, that we approach the question. We must remember some facts of importance; we must remember that since the year 1841 the annual increase in the consumption of tea in this country has been 1,727,000 lbs. There has been a gradual increase since 1841 of the consumption of tea, even at a duty of 240 per cent., and that increase during the last few years has been much larger. The increase in the consumption during the last six years, without any reduction of duty, has been nearly 10,000,000 lbs. In 1851 the consumption in round numbers was 54,000,000 lbs., while in 1844 it was 44,000,000 lbs. In considering this subject, it was impossible to shut our eyes to what had occurred in respect to the consumption of sugar. The consumption of sugar in the year 1844, the year immediately preceding the great reduction of the duty, was 4,129,000 cwt., in 1850 it was 6,200,000 cwt., and in 1851 it was nearly 6,600,000 cwt., showing an increase

in the first six years of the reduced duty of about one-half, and in seven years, of considerably more than one-half, the duty having been reduced in the proportion of 25 to 10. In dealing with tea, we are of opinion that it would be perfectly vain to attempt to make any difference either between black and green or between any qualities whatever. We are persuaded that in making any such attempt we should only involve ourselves in great trouble; that we should not obtain the object we all desire; and that in this question, as in malt, or in any other question of a similar kind, the boldest is the wisest course.

I mentioned before that we were not of opinion that the reductions of duties on articles so far of a similar character that they both tend to the sustenance of the people in the form of beverages, at all interfere with each other. I do not know any more striking case than the case of coffee. I think that in 1808 there was little more imported into this country than 1,000,000 lbs. of coffee. The duty was then considerable. It was changed: it was much lowered; and in 1809—and remember what our population then was as compared with what it is at present—the importation was nearly 10,000,000 lbs. But simultaneously with that increased consumption of coffee the consumption of tea has increased, and we are now consuming 37,000,000 lbs. of coffee, while, as I have shown, last year we consumed 54,000,000 lbs. of tea, and probably we shall not consume much less than 57,000,000 lbs. in the financial year ending January 5, 1853. Under these circumstances, availing ourselves of the experience which dealing with the sugar-duties has given, following a precedent which I think has been so successful, we think the proposition that we ought to make to the House—a proposition which I believe is in every way a safe proposition—should also be one in its nature of a complete and comprehensive character. The present duty upon tea, with the five per cent. added, is 2s. 2½d. a pound. Without making any distinction in the qualities of tea, we propose that we should reduce that duty to 1s. a pound; and we propose that, following the example of the sugar-duties, that reduction shall extend over the term of six years: that in the first year



there should be a reduction of  $4\frac{1}{4}$ d. per pound. (Laughter.) I think honourable gentlemen, when they have reflected for a moment, will find that they are too precipitate in their laughter, because we have to consider two things; we have not only to consider the revenue, but also the case as it affects the consumers, who seem to be quite forgotten by honourable gentlemen opposite. There is not the slightest doubt that if the state of the revenue allowed us at once to reduce the duty to 1s. a pound, you would probably find the greater proportion of the reduction would not go to the advantage of the consumer: because, although I have great confidence in the resources of China for the production of tea; although I know that China is the most populous country in the world, without stating how many hundred millions may be there; and although I know that tea is used in every part of China, and that the quantity exported is comparatively a very small part of that which is produced and consumed in China; and although I know very well that there is an annual surplus left of that exporting quantity in China, still I am perfectly aware that if there is a sudden demand in this market, and you have not taken the usual and prudential care and consideration upon which all trade must be conducted, you will not find the consumer will benefit to the extent of the remission in question, while at the same time the revenue must suffer considerably. It takes three or four years to make a tea-tree, and that is a point to be considered in dealing with these duties. If you want to increase production, especially of such an article as tea, you cannot suddenly go with a demand for which they are not prepared; but if you take the scale which Her Majesty's Government propose—a very moderate scale, I admit; but, I believe, a very safe one—I think, with very slight injury to the revenue, you will ultimately obtain that cheap and superior article which you would desire. Well, then, what we propose in dealing immediately with this article—and it must be remembered that tea is not like an article of domestic produce, but is subject to very different conditions—what we propose is, that there should be an immediate reduction of  $4\frac{1}{4}$ d. per pound in the duty on tea, reducing it from 2s.  $2\frac{1}{4}$ d. to 1s. 10d. I believe I have taken the

increased consumption under that reduced duty at a very safe figure. Instead of 54,000,000 lbs, upon which the last January revenue was raised, I only put 60,000,000 lbs. for the first year of the reduced duty, being an increase of 6,000,000 lbs., but virtually not much more than 3,000,000 lbs., because, as I have told the House, the consumption of tea has so much increased on the quantity on which the revenue was last taken in January 1852, that probably the amount of the consumption of tea for this year will be 57,000,000 lbs. Therefore, virtually, I only calculated upon an increase of 3,000,000 lbs., at the reduced duty for the first year. I think, when we take the average of a great many years, and find that we have from year to year attained a similar increase, that we may well calculate upon an increase of 2,000,000 lbs. a year.

This is not an excessive calculation. I think the reduction we propose is one that we can make with perfect safety to our finances, as I will show to the House when I sum up the changes in the taxation of the country which Her Majesty's Government have determined to recommend. I propose, then, in regard to tea, that we should immediately reduce the duty  $4\frac{1}{4}$ d. a lb., and that in each subsequent year it should be reduced 2d. a pound until it arrives at 1s. I believe that if you will adopt that system, you will very little injure the revenue, and that you will gradually enable the people of this country to have a supply, at a very reasonable rate, of a very favourite beverage, and that you will do more than that—that you will give a great stimulus to the commerce, the shipping, and the manufactures of this country. For my own part, I do not know any measure more calculated to give a great stimulus to the commerce and shipping of this country than a measure dealing largely and extensively with the tea-duties; and, although I might have been glad to offer to the House a project with regard to this duty which, at the first blush, might seem of a more favourable character, yet, considering the circumstances under which Her Majesty's Government make their exposition of the financial policy they recommend—that the financial year is not yet concluded, and other circumstances—I am persuaded that we have taken a prudent as well as a bold

course, and that if the House accepts our proposition, they will have consented to one of the most important arrangements, and sanctioned one of the most effectual measures, ever brought forward to stimulate the commerce of this country.

Sir, there is one duty I am about to deal with, and which is connected with this branch of the subject, and which, perhaps I ought to have adverted to before : and that is the hop-duty. We are unwilling to make this effort to give cheap beer to the people without dealing with one of the important ingredients of that beverage. The House is aware there are two duties now levied upon hops. There is the old duty of the time of Queen Anne, and there is the war-imposed duty during our great European struggle. Those duties are almost equal in amount : in round numbers, without the fractions, they amount nearly to about 1*d.* per lb. each ; and what we propose is, that the old war duty—a very unpopular duty ; a duty which ought never to have been continued—should be remitted. At present we do not propose to take off all. Something must be left for future statements. Still, I think in reducing the hop-duty one-half, and the malt-duty one-half, and reducing the tea-duties immediately considerably in the pound, and in establishing machinery which will bring them down to 1*s.* a lb., it cannot be said that we have been unmindful of the claims of the community, subjected to the principle of unrestricted competition.

Now, Sir, there is one point of some importance which I think I ought to touch upon. We are raising the revenue of this country and recommending all these measures on the principle that the revenue of this country shall mainly depend on the consuming power of the people. But it has been said of late—it has been rumoured about with considerable vehemence—that the consuming power of the people is rapidly diminishing. Some modern economists—I speak of those statements which meet us in many quarters and in many places—say that the consuming power of the people is in rapid diminution ; and I think I am only doing my duty in calling the attention of this House to the subject, for it is one that very much agitates the public mind ; and it is the duty of the House to instruct the public mind upon subjects of so much

importance ; for, if that is true, certainly the principle upon which I am recommending these measures is erroneous and mistaken. Now, Sir, I have no hesitation in saying that no evidence reaches me which in any way leads me to believe there is the slightest foundation for the opinion which is said to prevail—that the consuming power of the people is diminishing. I apprehend the idea which has given rise to the opinion that the consuming power of the people is diminishing is founded upon the emigration which has taken place from this country ; and that is a subject to which the honourable and learned member for Wolverhampton called the attention of the House the other night. There is no doubt that, if we look to the returns of emigration, we shall find that there has been a greater amount of emigration from this country within this year than is counterbalanced by the births that have been registered in England and Wales. In the year 1849 the emigration was, in round numbers, 300,000 ; in 1850, 280,000 ; in 1851, 335,000 ; and on October 1, 1852, the last return I have—that is to say, in three-quarters of a year—they are in amount nearly equal to the whole of the year 1851—namely, 332,000. There is no doubt also that the births of this country in the year 1851 were in round numbers little more than 600,000, and the deaths amounted to 400,000. So that it would seem by these returns that our births exceeded our deaths by 200,000 in the year 1851 ; and that our emigration exceeded the superfluity of our births by considerably above 100,000 ; but if these facts are a little examined—if they are a little analysed, it will be found there is no foundation for the conclusions that have been hastily drawn from them.

In the first place the return of our births, marriages and deaths is confined to England and Wales ; and, in the second place, the amount of emigration from England and Wales is small—two-thirds of it is from Ireland, a country which does not figure in the returns of our births and population. Then we have to consider the different causes that have produced emigration from Ireland and emigration from England. The emigration from Ireland is produced by a social system that has broken to pieces ; it is produced, I may say, by the misery

of the people. Now, the emigration from England is produced by causes exactly contrary to those I have stated with respect to Ireland. The people in this country were never better off, but they have foreign inducements that act upon their spirit of energy and enterprise, and they are determined to seek even better fortunes than they experience in their native land. That is the first point—that is the great difference between the causes that have produced the emigration of the two countries. The emigration from England is, in fact, only 100,000 a year, while there is an addition of 200,000 to its population. There is nothing, it would seem, excessively to be apprehended in the fact that our emigration, stimulated by the higher aspirations of man, and not occasioned by a sense of misery, so far affects our population that 100,000 persons quit us, while the natural increase of our population is 200,000; but even if there were 200,000 or 300,000 of our population quitting England, I could not view emigration, upon such conditions as those under which the emigration from Great Britain takes place, as a source of weakness to the country, or—which is the point for us to consider, in speaking of the finances of the country—as a source of diminution in its consuming power. On the contrary—though one naturally shrinks from paradoxes upon a subject so grave—my own opinion is that it has a tendency to increase the consuming power. Every emigrant from England generally becomes an English colonist, and an English colonist becomes an English customer, and our markets are stimulated, our people are employed, and their wages are improved by the very circumstance which some regard as tending to our decay and dissolution.

But even if I look to the case of Ireland, where emigration takes place under conditions so contrary to those of England, I am still obliged to arrive at a similar conclusion. Have honourable gentlemen remembered what the state of Ireland was a few years ago? Have they forgotten that memorable document, the Report of the Devon Commission? Have they remembered that description, which circulated throughout Europe, of there being in Ireland 2,400,000 paupers—that more than one-third of the people were receiving no wages of

any kind—that they were living in hovels—littered on straw, feeding on dry roots, and often on seaweed? That was the description given by Royal Commissioners, under a Royal Commission, of a great portion of the people in Ireland. Well then, you have got rid, in a certain degree, of that population. It is, no doubt, a dark passage—it is, no doubt, a gloomy chapter, in the history of any country, that such events should occur; but I am only looking at it in a financial point of view to-night. I am bound, in bringing forward measures such as, on the part of the Government, I am now bringing forward, not to evade a matter of such vast interest, upon the truth of which the whole subject depends. It is a question of the utmost importance—the consuming power of the people of this country. But although we have lost in Ireland more than one million and a-half of the population, has the revenue of Ireland suffered a diminution in proportion to that loss? On the contrary, the revenue of Ireland, in its worst time, never very sensibly diminished. Between the year before the famine and the present year, there has not been a difference of anything like half a million. I believe in the former year the revenue from Ireland was very little more than 4,000,000*l.*, and—I am sorry I am trusting to my memory on this point—it is now, I think, 3,700,000*l.* and upwards, and it is in a very buoyant state. I take the case of Ireland because we are there apparently labouring under very disadvantageous circumstances. All this shows that the consuming power of a people does not depend on their numbers but on their condition; and I am persuaded that if the exodus, as it is called, of the Irish people continues, it will end even in Ireland becoming a much wealthier country, and that the consuming power of the people of that country will not only be sustained, but will increase. But as regards Great Britain, I believe that the emigration that has taken place, instead of being a source of disquietude and alarm, is, in fact, the means by which the wealth of the country will be greatly increased; and that it will have a most beneficial effect upon the people that remain; that it will develop their resources, and give opportunities to many that they never before possessed; that the general result will be beneficial to the revenue,

and that not only the consuming power of the people will increase, but also the population.

There is one point connected with this subject of very considerable importance. There is an apprehension entertained by some persons that there has been of late an unnatural rise in the rate of wages. Great authorities are, I understand, of opinion that the rate of wages is increasing so rapidly that the profits will not only be diminished but destroyed. Now, I am bound to say that in pursuance of my duty I have made inquiry into this subject, but I have not received any evidence of that extraordinary rise of wages of which we have heard. I believe that there has been a rise in wages, and I believe, moreover, that it has been very much to the public benefit; and that, if it continues, the public will be still more benefited. One thing, I think, is clear, that the consuming power of the country has not been diminished by the augmentation in the rate of wages. But, Sir, although the rate of profit depends upon the rate of wages, that is not the only element in this great question. There is another element still more important in its solution, and that is the rate of interest. The employer of labour may pay more to his workman—I hope he does; but the employer of capital is obtaining that capital at the present day on much more favourable terms, and with a facility which no employer of labour has ever before enjoyed. Sir, the honourable gentleman the member for Wolverhampton (Mr. C. Villiers) said the other night that the discovery of gold, like the increase of any other article, gives great activity to commerce, but does not give it more activity than any other article of exchangeable value; and he called upon me to meet him upon that point. I did not think that that was exactly the fitting occasion to go into that question; but I deny the position of the honourable gentleman that the discovery of gold, like the production of any other article, while it gives activity to commerce, gives to it no more activity than would be occasioned by the increase of any other article. I maintain that it has not only given activity to commerce, but that it has influenced the commercial operations of this country to an extent which no other article could have exercised. I say that the

discovery of gold, considering the currency which we possess, has established credit in this country in a manner which no political economist could ever have imagined. I say that it has increased and confirmed credit in this country, and that that increase and confirmation of credit has, of course, proportionately increased the employment of the people. It would seem to be mere blind and obstinate prejudice to shut our eyes to that conclusion.

But there is another question to be considered in regard to our prosperity at this moment, and that is, Will the present low rate of interest last? I hope it will. My opinion is—though it is, perhaps, imprudent in me now to volunteer it—my opinion is that whatever imprudences may occur, and I need not say that I deprecate them; but, notwithstanding some imprudences, the present rate of interest will mainly continue. It would seem to depend upon conditions and circumstances which have never before prevailed in this country—natural circumstances and permanent conditions—and I cannot but believe that, if we only act with tolerable prudence, with such advantages as we derive from a low rate of interest, arising from natural causes, this country has before it an opportunity of material progress such as never occurred before to the vision of any statesman.

Sir, the Committee will remember that by the remission of taxation which I have proposed on the part of the Government, through the measures I have attempted to place before them, there will be a reduction of taxation to the amount of between 3,000,000*l.* and 4,000,000*l.* sterling. I shall have occasion hereafter to place the items more particularly before the House. But by the remission which I propose in the malt-tax, there will be a reduction of taxation to the extent of 2,500,000*l.*; by the reduction on the tea-duties an immediate remission of 900,000*l.*; and by the reduction in the hop-duty, the revenue from which, as you know, is fluctuating, but the average of which, I think, may be taken at 300,000*l.*, I have, in fact, proposed a reduction of taxation to the amount of something between 3,000,000*l.* and 4,000,000*l.* sterling. But I must remind the Committee that, although this is only December, in a few



months one of the principal sources of the revenue will terminate, and that, if they support the propositions of the Government, they must not only encounter the great remissions of taxation, and, consequently, some considerable diminution of the revenue; but they must likewise be prepared to deal with the consequences of a law expiring which now gives us more than 5,000,000*l.* sterling per annum. I mean the property and income tax. It will become the duty of the House, then, to decide what they will do with the property and income tax. Now, it has always been to me, as I am sure it must be to any gentleman, exceedingly disagreeable to read to the House anything I may have said on a previous occasion; and I am quite sure that nothing would ever induce me to quote my own language by way of authority; but it is absolutely necessary that on the present occasion I should presume to call the attention of the House to some remarks which I made on the subject of direct taxation, when I laid before the House in the earlier session of this year the financial statement, more especially as many gentlemen are now in the House who were not then members. I then called the attention of the House to the difficulty with which the revenue of the country was raised. I reviewed the objections which were made to indirect taxes in the shape of customs' duties and excise duties, and I at last showed that, although there had long prevailed an abstract opinion in favour of direct taxation, yet all attempts that had hitherto been made to apply it to the raising of our revenue had only led to the conclusion that it was contrary to every principle of science and justice. I then said, speaking of the Committee on the Property and Income Tax, then sitting, and whose opinion I naturally referred to with reserve, as they had not then made their report to the House—I then said:—

‘There is another point on which I can speak with more frankness in reference to the tax upon property and income. I have not presumed, and will not presume, to give an opinion upon the justice or injustice of a change in the mode by which the assessment of permanent and temporary incomes is effected; but there is a point, I believe, on which the committee is so unanimous that their opinion need not be a secret; and it is also,

I believe, the unanimous opinion of the House of Commons, as I am sure it is of the country: namely, that if taxes of this character—if measures of direct taxation like the income-tax—are to form not temporary but permanent features of our system of finance, they cannot rest upon a system of exemptions. Well, but if they are not to rest upon a system of exemptions, do you augment the methods to which a Chancellor of the Exchequer may successfully appeal for the purpose of raising revenue? No doubt direct taxation is in its theory an easy, a simple, and a captivating process; but when you wish to apply that direct taxation generally, it is astonishing the obstacles you encounter and the prejudices you create. Sir, to my mind—and I think it is a theory pretty well established—direct taxation should be nearly as universal in its application as indirect taxation. The man who lives in a palace and a cottager, as consumers, are proportionally assessed. It is not, perhaps, possible that in direct taxation you can effect so complete a result; perhaps it is not necessary; but that, if your revenue is to depend mainly, or in a great degree, upon direct taxation—if it is permanently to depend upon direct taxation—you must make the application of the direct tax general, is to me a conclusion which it is impossible to escape. No doubt, by establishing a temporary measure of direct taxation, based upon a large system of exemptions, you may give a great impulse to industry; you may lighten the springs of industry very effectually for a time; but—not to dwell upon the gross and glaring injustice of a system of finance that would tax directly a very limited portion of the population—but looking only to the economical and financial consequences of such a system, who cannot but feel that, in the long run, industry itself must suffer from such a process? For, after all, what is direct taxation founded on a system of exemptions? It is confiscation. It is making war upon the capital which ultimately must employ that very industry which you wish to relieve.’ (3 Hansard, cxxi. 16.)

I beg the House not to suppose that I have read this as any authority on the subject; but I feel that it is necessary that the sentiments which I uttered in the financial statement I

made to the House six or eight months ago should be kept clearly before them. I also said—

‘We deem it our duty to impress upon the Committee and upon the country the dangerous course in which they have embarked—to impress upon them the absolute necessity, now or in another Parliament, of arriving at some definite understanding on what principle the revenue of this country ought to be raised. We deem it our duty to denounce as most pernicious to all classes of this country the systematic reduction of indirect taxation, while at the same time you levy your direct taxes from a very limited class.’ (3 Hansard, exxi. 35.)

Now, Sir, I cannot say that subsequent experience has changed or modified my opinions on this subject. I am clearly of opinion that, if we have recourse to direct taxation, that direct taxation should be as general, at least in theory, as indirect taxation. How far it may be desirable to modify it in practice, on the ground of expediency, is a fair subject for consideration; but I hold that the practice of establishing direct taxation on a large system of exemption is most pernicious, and ought as much as possible to be discountenanced. Well then, Sir, I venture in offering to the House the views which Her Majesty’s ministers entertain with respect to the property and income tax, to lay it down as a general principle that, in considering this question, we ought to make our direct taxation—in theory at least—as general as our indirect taxation. And, Sir, when I consider the very large exemptions which are connected with this tax, there is one which I am bound at once to notice and take into consideration—the largest of all exemptions—and that is the exemption of Ireland. Now, Sir, when in the early part of the year I proposed, on the part of Her Majesty’s Government, that this tax on property and income should be continued for one year, I made no reference whatever to Ireland. The arrangement then made was avowedly a mere temporary arrangement, and it was therefore quite unnecessary to enter into the discussion then. But, having now to consider the question much more widely, I do not think it consistent with my duty to evade expressing the opinion of Her Majesty’s Government on the subject.

Sir Robert Peel, in his financial statement of 1842, when he first introduced the property and income tax, proposed to impose on Ireland, as an equivalent for the property and income tax, two other measures—the one was an increase of the duty on spirits, which, I remember, he estimated would produce 250,000*l.* a year, and the other was an increase of the duty on stamps, in matters affecting property, which he estimated would produce 160,000*l.*—making altogether 410,000*l.* a year. That was to be the contribution of Ireland to the revenue in another form, and as an equivalent for the exemption from the property and income tax. Now, I must remind the House—and it is disagreeable to have to discharge that duty: one would naturally like to be always taking off taxes, and never reminding any gentleman that he had not perhaps paid those which had been expected of him; but it is necessary to inform the House that the measure for increasing the duty on spirits, which was estimated to produce 250,000*l.* a year, has since been rescinded, in consequence of its having been found to have stimulated illicit distillation; and that whereas in 1841, before the passing of the Property and Income Tax Act, the aggregate receipt from the stamp duties in Ireland was 470,000*l.* per annum, in the year 1852 they produced only 486,000*l.*; so that Ireland has contributed, as an equivalent for the property and income tax, instead of 410,000*l.* per annum, as was expected, only 16,000*l.*

Well, Sir, but notwithstanding all this, it is impossible to be insensible to what Ireland has gone through during that interval. When Sir Robert Peel brought forward the income-tax in the year 1842 it was impossible for him or the most experienced statesman to have foreseen the long catalogue of calamities that awaited Ireland. Almost every cause that could exhaust and every process that could debilitate a country and society have been brought to bear on that unhappy land. I freely admit—to use, not a classical, but a frequent epithet—that as regards its financial condition, Ireland since that period, or at least during many years, has been in a very exceptional state. But the state of Ireland is happily not now without a ray of hope. As far as I can form an opinion—and I can assure

my Irish friends that I have taken the utmost pains to make myself acquainted with its condition—I think I may venture to speak of Ireland without using the language of despair, or the accents of desolation. You have had a crushing Poor Law; but what is your present position with regard even to that overwhelming evil? Is it not mitigated—is it not more endurable? Permit me to place before the House a return of the present incidence of poor-law taxation in Ireland. I don't want to insult any gentleman by showing him that his country is not ruined—I prefer showing him that he possesses increased means of contributing to the national taxation. I am only anxious in fulfilment of my duty, to convey, as far as I can, a correct view of the state of Her Majesty's dominions to her faithful Commons.

Now, I have here a 'comparative summary, in provinces, of the expenses incurred in the poor-law unions of Ireland during the financial year ended September 29, 1850, 1851, and 1852 respectively.' I find from that document that the poor-law expenditure in Ireland in 1850 amounted to the vast sum of 1,320,000*l.*; that in 1851 it was reduced to 1,129,000*l.*; that in the year ending September 29 last the expenditure which in 1850 was 1,320,000*l.* had been reduced to 885,000*l.* I find also that the decrease of expenditure in 1851, as compared with 1850, amounted to nearly 200,000*l.*, or at the rate of 14 per cent.; that the decrease of expenditure in 1852, as compared with 1851, was in amount 274,000*l.* or at the rate of 24 per cent., and that the decrease in the expenditure of the year 1852, as compared with 1850, was in amount not less than 465,000*l.*, or at the rate of 35 per cent. Now, Sir, I am sure, when one has this authentic return before him, he is justified in not altogether despairing of the condition of Ireland. In Connaught alone I find that the diminution of expenditure in 1852 as compared with 1850, was no less than 116,000*l.*, or at the rate of 48 per cent. Now, Sir, in looking to the condition of Ireland, I must call the attention of the House to another document before me, because it completes the picture of the incidence of poor-law taxation, of which we have heard so much. I don't deny that our friends in Ireland have suffered from the

severe incidence of taxation. I admit that they have gone through a terrible ordeal; but I say to them as I say to the West India interest, 'What I do for you must be with reference to your present position, and not with reference to the past.' Now, here is a document which reached me just before I came down to the House, and which completes the picture of the state of Ireland with reference to the Poor Law, of which we have heard so much, and from which Ireland has suffered so severely. It is addressed to me officially, and is as follows:—

'You may remember that, in September last, the sum of 30,000*l.*, being the greater portion of the balance of the Irish Rate-in-Aid Fund, was appropriated by the Treasury to the liquidation of the debts of certain unions in the west of Ireland, subject to the condition that any union assisted in this manner would thenceforth be considered as excluded from the list of distressed unions, and that, previously to such relief being recommended the Poor Law Commissioners must be satisfied that proper provision would be made by rates for the immediate future requirements of the union. A report has been this day received from the Poor Law Commissioners describing the proceedings taken by them under the above instruction, from which it appears that all the unions affected by this arrangement, except the —— Union' [I forbear mentioning the name] 'have given the assurance and struck the rates as required, and that the reluctance of the guardians of the —— Union to comply with the prescribed condition does not arise from inability, but from a desire to transfer a greater share of the burden of their rates to the public.'

I don't wonder at the laughter of honourable members, and that is the reason why I did not read the name of the union.

'This declaration of solvency, in respect to all the remaining unions of Ireland about whose power of maintaining their poor any doubt remained, is a fact of great importance, and you may think it proper to refer to it in your financial statement. The object of establishing a comprehensive and complete Poor Law in Ireland has been finally accomplished, and the whole of Ireland is now able to maintain its own poor, without external pecuniary assistance from any quarter. There is still a balance

of the Rate-in-Aid left of upwards of 12,000*l.*, which will be more than sufficient to meet any more than usually distressed cases of particular electoral divisions.'

Such, then, is the picture of the condition of Ireland. I don't say it is perfectly satisfactory. Don't let my honourable friends from Ireland suppose that I am malignantly misrepresenting them, and that I am not doing justice to their calamities. All I ask them to admit is that, having gone through great difficulties and borne them like men, their position is now very much improved. That is all I ask. But there are other reasons why there has been some discontent evinced that Ireland has not been subjected to the income-tax. People are discontented that instead of getting 410,000*l.* from Ireland, as was originally expected when the property and income tax was imposed on this country, they have only got 16,000*l.* People, too, have been disinclined to remember—although I confess it is churlish—the actual circumstances of the case, and to forget the sorrows and calamities of Ireland; but there are other complaints of a very different character, with regard to the non-extension of the income-tax to Ireland. The Governor of the Bank of England has made an official complaint to me that at the present moment the Bank of England is prepared to purchase terminable annuities, but that it is impossible for him to contend with the Governor of the Bank of Ireland, in consequence of Irish funded property not paying income-tax. He says: 'I have no doubt the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be receiving deputations from injured interests; but there is really nobody more unjustly treated by recent legislation than the Governor and Company of the Bank of England by the property-tax not being extended to Ireland.' There is another point of view in which the subject ought to be considered. The amount of public funded property in Ireland is increasing yearly, and has for a long time increased in consequence of its not being liable to the tax which the same description of property has paid in England. I mention this to show what a difficult thing an income-tax is based upon exemptions.

Now, Sir, I shall venture to treat this great exemption in the following manner. I do not think that it would be wise to

treat with any harshness the landed proprietors of Ireland. They have suffered severely from the late famine and consequent legislation, and I should be sorry suddenly to pounce on Ireland and to say, 'You shall pay your quota.' I think we ought to do everything that is possible to assist that 'wise, just, and beneficial' change that has taken place in Ireland; and I do not think that it is expedient that we should throw any obstacles at the present moment in the way of the regeneration of that country. But I must say this, that, remembering what has been done for that country, I shall feel it my duty when I lay before the House the schedules of the new property and income tax, to recommend an extension of the tax to funded property in Ireland and to salaries in that country.

Sir, an honourable gentleman, a friend of mine, with reference to this subject, asked me the other night whether Her Majesty's Government were prepared to carry into effect the recommendations of the committee of the House of Lords with regard to the Consolidated Annuities. The amount of the Consolidated Annuities is 240,000*l.* per annum, or something like that sum. Sir, the House will recollect how the Consolidated Annuities came into existence. There was a loan made to Ireland of nearly 10,000,000*l.* Subsequently that loan was reduced in amount to about one-half. I was always one who believed that that loan was in a great degree advanced for an Imperial calamity, and that it ought, consequently, to be considered in that light; and I do not object to the arrangement then made, in any sense whatever. But the House will understand that the balance of that loan, after being reduced by that amount, was thrown into the form of Consolidated Annuities, which were calculated with reference to the peculiar circumstances of each case. I must refrain from entering into the discussion of this question at present, but I think I am not free to avoid all allusion to the subject. I have shown to the House to-night that in 1852 as compared with 1851 there has been a diminution in the charge of poor-rate in Ireland of no less than 274,000*l.*, and this is a sum considerably greater than the whole of the Consolidated Annuities. And I must beg my honourable friend who asked me the question, to recollect what



I have said with reference to those persons who in England are suffering from what they consider the unjust incidence of local taxation. I have shown that the reduction in the amount of pauperism this year is greater than the whole establishment charges; and I tell him, also, that in considering this question he must remember that the state of Ireland is much improved since the recommendation made by the committee of the House of Lords. Let me not be misinterpreted. It is the intention of Her Majesty's Government to consider the subject of the Consolidated Annuities; but they are not prepared to bind themselves in any way by the recommendations of the committee of the House of Peers. The Government will consider the question entirely on its merits; and I have myself prepared, and will submit to the House, some resolutions which I have carefully considered, and which I believe are justified by the circumstances, and will be beneficial in their operation; but I beg my honourable friend not to go away under the false impression that the Government are prepared to carry into operation the recommendations of the committee of the House of Lords.

With regard to the income and property tax, I have laid down one principle—that direct taxation should be as general as indirect taxation, and that a measure of direct taxation founded upon a large scheme of exemption ought not to be tolerated. With respect to that important measure, the property and income tax, I have to state another principle which Her Majesty's Government are prepared to assert, and that is to acknowledge a difference between permanent and precarious incomes. Sir, I will not enter into any arguments upon that subject at present. Although I have curtailed my observations as they have occurred upon various topics which I have had to encounter, and although there is much that I must still advert to, I feel that it would be impossible that I should on this occasion enter into a discussion which deserves, and probably will receive, on the part of the House of Commons, prolonged and mature deliberation. My duty now I conceive to be, to make an exposition of the policy that Her Majesty's Government are prepared to recommend; and all I have to do is to place that before the House in as clear a manner as I can.

Sir, viewing the property and income tax with reference to the two principles I have laid down—namely, that direct taxation ought to be in its nature as general as indirect taxation, and that it ought not to be established upon a system of exemptions; and, secondly, that a difference should be recognised by the legislature between realised and precarious incomes—I will now offer to the House the rate of duties such as Her Majesty's Government are prepared to recommend to the adoption of Parliament. Sir, notwithstanding the large remission of taxation which Her Majesty's Government have recommended—a remission of taxation immediately amounting to 3,500,000*l.*, and eventually relieving the consumer of the country to a much greater extent—it is not the intention of the Government to recommend any increase of duty in any of the schedules of the property and income tax. I will first consider and state to the Committee the exemptions which Her Majesty's ministers think it expedient to recognise and sanction. We shall recommend that on all industrial incomes the exemptions shall be limited to incomes below 100*l.* a year, that being the point at which we deem that wages enter into calculation. Upon incomes arising from property we take the point of exemption at below 50*l.* a year. Sir, I have now to detail to the House the rate of difference which we shall recommend should be established between schedules B, D, and E, and the two schedules of realised property. I have already told the Committee that we do not propose to increase the rate payable in schedules A and C. That will be taken, as heretofore, at 7*d.* in the pound. We propose that the rate on the other schedules shall be estimated at three-fourths of that rate, and therefore it will be 5¼*d.* (which will be exactly three-fourths) on schedules B, D and E. The produce of schedule A, at 7*d.*, will be, as before, 2,649,000*l.* The produce of schedule B, the farmer's schedule, will be estimated in this manner:—We take the estimate of the profits of the farmers, not at one-half the rent, as heretofore, but at one-third. We have investigated that subject, and we find that, however active trade may be, the whole tendency of late years has been to a diminution of profits, and we are persuaded that the test of the farmers' profits has been taken too high. We

have taken, therefore, one-third the rent as the measure of profit, instead of one-half; and consequently, under schedule B, the farmers will pay 156,000*l.*, which in amount is exactly one-half what they pay under the present rate. From schedule C I calculate there will be received 746,000*l.* at 7*d.*, as at present. Under schedule D, at the mitigated rate, the estimate is that 1,162,000*l.* will be received, and that under schedule E also, under the mitigated rate, 248,000*l.* will be received. The total of the five schedules will be, it is estimated, 4,961,000*l.* I estimate the increase—if the exemption is limited to incomes under 50*l.* upon property, and under 100*l.* upon industrial incomes—I estimate the increase at about 431,000*l.* But I think it right to say that in that estimate I have taken into consideration the position of the clergyman whose income is under 100*l.* a year. The position in which he is placed, in the manner in which the duty is now raised, is extremely severe, and I may say unfair. He is rated under schedule A at the highest scale, whereas a Dissenting minister who has 100*l.* a year, being rated under the scale of salaries in the mitigated schedule, would have an advantage of the mitigated rate, and with an income under 100*l.* per annum, would have the benefit of a total exemption. The position of a clergyman is, in fact, the position of a person working for a salary, but, from the nature of the property from which he derives the sources of his maintenance, he is deprived of the advantage of the mitigated schedule. And therefore it is necessary to make special provision for him, because he must still be assessed under schedule A. I have estimated the probable diminution from giving clergymen the benefit of total exemption under 100*l.* per annum at 30,000*l.*, but I have taken that into account, and it will not affect the figures which I have put down, of 5,361,000*l.*, as the produce of the income-tax. I add for Ireland the modest sum of 60,000*l.* The total sum will be about 5,421,000*l.* Generally speaking, I think I may say that the result will be, that the property and income tax will produce the average that is produced by the present existing Act. Perhaps it may be advisable for me to make provision for some slight diminution; but, generally speaking, I think the average will be about that of

the last three years of the present tax; and therefore, if the House should adopt our proposition, I think the result would not materially affect our financial income.

Assuming, Sir, for the moment, that the property and income tax, as I have now laid it before the House will not affect our Budget of the year, it is now necessary for me to approach the ways and means by which the diminution of the revenue, occasioned by the measures that I have recommended on the part of Her Majesty's Government, may be met. It is necessary for me, however, before I enter upon that, to make some reference to a subject of great interest, which will have the effect of increasing the public expenditure. Sir, it will be my duty on an early occasion to place before the House a supplementary estimate for the expenditure of the present year with reference to the national defences. It will, of course, be necessary in the usual financial statement for the year 1853-4 to make an estimate which I shall have to place before the House, and to take into consideration the whole expenditure of the year; and therefore that will be the more convenient moment to advert to the subject. Sir, I know the great difficulty and delicacy of touching on a subject of this kind, but in my mind the difficulty is much increased, and the delicacy becomes much greater, by a prudish affectation of reserve, than by speaking to the House with the same frankness with which I should address them upon a less formal occasion. Sir, we are about to propose an increase, and no inconsiderable increase, in the estimates, and we may be met with the question of peace and war. Now, the fact is that the measures which we are going to lay before Parliament, and which we have the confident hope that Parliament will adopt, have nothing to do with peace or war. We should have brought them forward under any circumstances, and I believe that those who have preceded us, or those who may succeed us, would act in the same manner.

Sir, when we came into office, we found the estimates for the year already on the table; we accepted them on the understanding that there should be no delay interposed—that we should be enabled, as soon as possible, to appeal to the verdict of the country; and as there was a general understanding that

they were the estimates of our predecessors, they were passed without being canvassed, and thus the progress of public business was facilitated, and the appeal to the people hastened. But, Sir, the appeal was one that naturally engaged the attention of the nation, and it was one that must engage the attention of any cabinet that is charged with the conduct of the government of the country. It matters not what may be the original cause; it matters not what dynasty may be upon the throne upon the other side of the Channel; it does not turn upon what may have been said or done elsewhere, that the attention of the nation has been drawn to the state of the national defences. The attention was drawn originally by the highest military authority of the land. The effect of being so long in peace was brought to the consideration of the most industrious people in the world; it was drawn to their consideration while all the tendencies of the age seemed to secure tranquillity and happy repose. I say that there was no panic or precipitation, but, on the contrary, a prejudice against what the people of this country supposed to be disturbing the dreams of repose and prosperity in which they had indulged. But sooner or later the idea seized the public mind. It was taken more and more into consideration, and, totally irrespective of external circumstances, the nation arrived at the conclusion that this country was not in that state of defence that is necessary and desirable. They arrived at the conviction that it was of primary importance that the shores of this country should be protected, and that its defences should be complete. If I were asked, on the part of Her Majesty's Government—in no other way would I presume to give an opinion—what I thought was the tendency of the present age, and what the general course which present circumstances indicated, I should say, without reserve, speaking from the bottom of my heart, and in all sincerity, that I believe the predominant feeling of the present day was peace. But I believe the measures Her Majesty's Government intend to recommend to Parliament will tend to the preservation of peace.

On considering the question after the general election, we feel it to be our duty to lose no time in recommending the

necessary measures. If it be a fact—and I assume that it is a fact—that this country is not properly defended, and that it wants to be properly defended, let due preparations, we say, be made for its defence. On considering the question, we thought the best thing was to do it completely. We thought the best thing to do would be to put the navy of this country in the position in which we believe all Englishmen wish to see it; and the plans we have matured, and which, if the House will support our proposition, will be carried into complete effect, will be plans which will settle this question of our national defences for ever: that is to say, you will have all your arsenals and strong points in the kingdom defended, and you will have a real Channel fleet, which can assemble from its different rendezvous at the moment necessary, and which is the proper garrison and protection of the country. It would have been more convenient for Her Majesty's Government to defer the question, as they would have done if they had not felt it to be their paramount duty to bring it at once before the House of Commons. They were busied with measures the tendency of which, they believe, will be in due time to reduce the expenditure and establishments of the country. But they felt that it was totally impossible to mix up a question of this importance, and, from its nature, of this urgency, with questions of administrative reform. They felt that, if the country was not properly defended, and if the people wished it to be properly defended, the question was one which ought at once to be completely and definitely settled. Sir, we have taken those steps which we believe will ensure the complete defence of this country. It will be necessary for me to ask for a supplementary estimate, so far as this year is concerned. I hope there will not be any difficulty raised on the part of the House. The state of the finances of the country, as I shall show in a few minutes, will perfectly authorise me in asking a supplementary grant for the present year, to be supplied from the ways and means; and next year we shall ask your approval of an estimate which will increase our general estimate about 600,000*l*.

Well, Sir, having told the Committee that it will be my duty to ask its assent to a supplementary estimate for the ex-

penditure of this year which has occurred since the Appropriation Act was passed, I think it will be convenient if I give some account of the state of the finances, so that the Committee may form an opinion as to what our surplus may probably be at the end of the present financial year, from which the supply must be afforded for the supplementary estimates for the expenditure of the year since the appropriation. The Committee will recollect that in the early part of the year, when I offered to estimate what would be the surplus, I said the surplus would be about 460,000*l.*; but in making that statement I mentioned my intention of asking a vote of 200,000*l.* additional for the Kafir War. The Committee will perhaps recollect that on a subsequent occasion I came down and announced that it was not necessary to ask for that vote; therefore the estimated surplus, according to my statement, was virtually a surplus of 660,000*l.* There has been a reduction made in the interest of the floating debt amounting to about 40,000*l.*, and that, in fact, would make the estimated surplus on the data which I had before me early in the year 700,000*l.* I shall show the Committee how our finances are working since the commencement of the financial year on April 5 last. The state of our revenue is extremely favourable. I calculated at the beginning of the year that there would be a diminution of something more than 100,000*l.* upon the customs. I took into consideration the stimulus of the Exhibition given last year to consumption, and also the further reduction which has taken place in the sugar duties. I thought, therefore, we ought not to press too much on the customs, as they had done their duty very well, and that we should not be alarmed this year if there was some slight diminution. The two causes to which I have referred—the great stimulus given last year to consumption by the Exhibition, and the reduction of the duty on sugar—would, I think, give some diminution, which I estimated at 100,000*l.* I think there will be the same result of 100,000*l.* in the customs. From the commencement of the financial year to the present time, the result has been, from one month to another; it has been, on an average, as would give a result of 100,000*l.*

would give a little more ; but I think my estimate will be exactly fulfilled. I estimated an increase of about 50,000*l.* in the excise. There is at present a much greater increase in the excise ; but I am not prepared to say at the end of the year the estimate will be exceeded : it may, perhaps, but I think we ought not to take account of that. I estimated that the stamps would be about the same as last year. They have increased every week since the beginning of the year. Their increase has never for a moment fluctuated, and the total increase on stamps from April 5 to November 27 has been nearly 300,000*l.* I estimated a considerable reduction in the property-tax. I said it was necessary to calculate that we might lose 150,000*l.* on the property-tax. The property-tax, like the stamps, has been increasing every week progressively ; and at present, instead of a loss of 150,000*l.*, there is an increase of 187,000*l.* It would be neither convenient nor possible to give anything like a positive statement on the subject at present ; but I thought it would be agreeable to have these facts brought before the Committee in an authentic manner. I will now state my estimated surplus as virtually a surplus of 700,000*l.* It will be safe on the part of the Committee to add 500,000*l.* to that from the inland revenue. There will be some other increase of which they will have to take account ; but certainly I think that our surplus for the present year, taking the most prudent and coldest calculation, will on April 5, instead of being 460,000*l.*, as I estimated when I made my financial statement, be something approaching to 1,000,000*l.* more than that. I think the sum will be 1,300,000*l.* or 1,400,000*l.* I think, under these circumstances, I may ask for a vote for the increased expenditure incurred this year.

Sir, I mentioned that it was the hope and intention of Her Majesty's Government, if they were permitted to follow the course they had chalked out for themselves, ultimately, but not precipitately, to effect no inconsiderable reduction in the expenditure of the country. This, I think, is a subject which has hardly yet been fairly dealt with. Hitherto we have considered that retrenchment, and not efficiency, was the parent of economy. A Government has reduced estimates from the necessity of the



moment, and there has been an apparent reduction in expenditure; but it has always been followed by a collapse, and generally the unfortunate office of supplying the deficiency of one administration has fallen to their successors. One administration cuts down, another is obliged to increase; and, so long as it is made a mere question of pounds, shillings, and pence, I am certain that no permanent and substantial reduction in the expenditure of the country can be obtained. I think it the duty of an administration to look to the efficiency of the establishments of the country, and not to the rate at which they may be maintained. If you only make your establishments efficient, you will find almost as a natural consequence that you will save money; and therefore I take it to be efficiency, and not retrenchment, which is the true parent of economy. To effect retrenchments in the establishments of this country is about the most ungracious task in which an administration can embark. There is nothing easier in Opposition than to call for retrenchment; there is nothing more difficult in administration than to comply with that demand: so long as you leave your existing establishments founded on the same principles, and carried on in the same spirit, you will arrive at the result. I do not mean to make any observation which shall seem at all to cast censure on those by whom the permanent civil service of this country is carried on, and to whom those engaged in the administration of affairs have been so much indebted—on the contrary, the other night I had occasion to offer my tribute to their invaluable services. What they do, they do in the best manner; but they are not responsible for the establishments of the country. It is our opinion that the system of administration is not as advanced as other great operations are in this country. Whether we look to our commerce—whether we look to the other occupations of man—these have undergone more change with reference to the circumstances of the age than the establishments by which the administration of the country is conducted.

How are we to deal with these immense difficulties? If you attempt to reform, you have to meet the two most formidable obstacles in the world, prejudice and skill. The person

who presides over a great department does not like your interfering, and he has more knowledge than you have. What can be more difficult than to effect a reform under such circumstances? I have a great respect for the House of Commons, to which I owe everything, and there is no one who more highly esteems the labours of the committees of the House than I do. If I wanted a committee on the state of India, for example, I do not know that I could find anywhere a body of men who could conduct such an investigation in a manner so satisfactory. You bring a large body of men round the table—skilled statesmen, eminently qualified for investigating political and financial subjects. You bring to bear on public questions the knowledge and experience of those best qualified to arrive at just conclusions, and of men of the world. But if the House of Commons, by means of a committee, were to examine into a great public department, you would not arrive at a similar satisfactory conclusion as if the same men were investigating the affairs of India, or the operations of the Factory Act, or any subject of general interest in which the information, intelligence, and temper of men of the world may be brought to bear. You have too many men; you have men of different political opinions; and the results have always been that the inquiry has been fruitless. You have had committees of inquiry with respect to the Army, Navy, and Ordnance. What have you done? Nothing. But I say this: if you want administrative reform, why not apply to your great offices the same principles as those which you apply to your revenue departments? Issue commissions, and make the Government responsible for the information they acquire, and make them act upon it. I assume the House are sincere in their attempts to effect administrative reform. There is a question of great importance, with reference to these reforms, which has long been recommended to the attention of the House of Commons: that is, the bringing of the whole revenue of the country under control of Parliament. Well, we are prepared to recommend such a course, and when these financial measures are passed, I will take an opportunity of bringing the subject of administrative reform before the House, and I shall then explain in more

detail what is possible for me now only to touch upon—indeed, it is barely possible for me thus cursorily to advert to so important a subject—but I shall then explain the measures which Her Majesty's Government are prepared to propose. If they are supported in these measures, I believe that the effect would be most beneficial; and I believe that you will secure a reduction in the public expenditure.

There is a point on which I wish to ask the consent of the Committee. There is an establishment called the Public Works Loan Fund Commission. It is my intention to ask the House to terminate the operation of that commission. The nature of this establishment is as follows:—It was founded on principles exactly opposite to those which at present prevail, and organised under circumstances exactly opposite to those that now exist. In 1817 there was a surplus of labour and a deficiency of capital; 200,000 soldiers and sailors had been dismissed from the army and navy. It was thought necessary to give them factitious employment, and a certain body of men was appointed, who acted gratuitously, and with the greatest zeal, integrity and ability, throughout the whole time as Commissioners, and Exchequer bills were issued in order to give employment to the people. This system went on till about ten years ago, when the issue of Exchequer bills was arrested, and a certain annual sum was allotted from the Consolidated Fund. That system had gone on till, as I said, the circumstances are exactly the reverse of those in which that Commission was originally appointed. Instead of a surplus of labour there is a deficiency; instead of a want of capital there is a plethora. In consequence, the commissioners have a large balance at their command, and the system is of itself an extremely injudicious system. We propose—and I will state on the proper occasion the reasons why we think so—that this commission should terminate, and that the repayment of the advances shall be brought into the revenue, as part of the ways and means—like 'Old Stores.'

Sir, my task is nearly terminated; and if I have somewhat abused the patience of the Committee, I can only say, with great humility, that I hardly think any person had ever in the

same time to compress so many topics into so small a compass.

It now, Sir, becomes me to explain to the House the ways and means by which I propose that we shall accomplish the policy which Her Majesty's Government contemplate. I will now offer to the Committee an estimate with reference to the year 1853-54, so far as reduction of or increase in expenditure is concerned on the one hand, and so far as ways and means are concerned, on the other. I do not, of course, pretend to offer a formal estimate of what the various services will require in 1853-54. It would be perfectly absurd to offer such an estimate, and the House will not be so unreasonable as to ask it. If we remain in office, it will be my duty, at the proper time, to go into those necessary details. But I wish to take the year 1853-54 and to show what, in our opinion, will be the effect on the expenditure occasioned by the reductions we propose and the increased estimates, and what we must supply by extraordinary ways and means. I take the reduction of the malt-tax—making an allowance for putting an end to the Scotch drawback, and for the difference of duty levied on malt from barley, and from bere and bigg, to amount to about 2,500,000*l*. That reduction will not come into operation until October 10, 1853; but on that day it will be necessary for me to be prepared to pay the drawback on the stock-in-hand on which the reduced duty will then be levied. I take for that drawback the sum of 1,000,000*l*. The reduction of the duty on tea to 1*s*. 10*d* a pound, calculated on a consumption of 54,000,000 lbs., but subject to an increased consumption of 6,000,000 lbs., will cause a loss to the revenue in the year 1853-54 of 400,000*l*. on the present amount of revenue of 6,000,000*l*. The extra estimates—

Mr. Hume: What will be the loss on hops?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer: The duty on hops will not be affected in the financial year 1853-54; it is all payable now for that year, and the proposed reduction of duty will not come into operation till the year 1854-55. The extra estimates for the ensuing year I take at 600,000*l*.; and perhaps I may be permitted to say—as honourable gentlemen may be alarmed

at the idea of increased estimates—that I have received, not the army estimates for the year 1853–54, but a private memorandum as to their results. I don't want to boast of the fact, but by that document there is a diminution on those estimates. But I put the extra estimates at 600,000*l.* I put the light dues at 100,000*l.*; therefore there will be an extra demand upon our resources to the amount of 2,100,000*l.* (An honourable member: 3,000,000*l.*) In order that there shall be no mistake on the subject, I will just read the items again. The loss upon malt for the year 1853–54 will amount to 1,000,000*l.*; the loss on tea to 400,000*l.*; the extra estimates will be 600,000*l.*; and the light dues, 100,000*l.*—thus making 2,100,000*l.* Well, now for the ways and means. First, as to the surplus revenue for the year 1853–54. I have shown to the House that we may take our surplus for this year at 1,325,000*l.* or probably at 1,350,000*l.* I hope I shall never have to move another vote for the Kafir war. That came into our budget last year to the amount of 460,000*l.* I think, however, it would be imprudent to take credit for the whole of that 460,000*l.* in our future calculations, although our recent accounts from that quarter are of an extremely favourable character, and although, so far as the financial question is concerned, which comes more immediately under my notice as connected with the commissariat, I am very sanguine on the subject. Still, it is not at all impossible that we may have to propose a financial vote for extras on account of the Kafir war; I should therefore say we ought to take off 200,000*l.* on account of that charge. I take, therefore, the surplus for the year 1853–54 at 1,600,000*l.* I take the repayments, if the House accedes to my proposition with regard to the Public Works Fund being paid to the public treasury, at 400,000*l.*; that altogether will make 2,000,000*l.*

It now becomes my duty to propose to the House the means by which we shall be able to increase the revenue of the country. That, it will be admitted, is the most difficult thing in the world. But if I had the best case possible, I am not sure that I should be able to obtain the attention of the House to any extended remarks of a general nature, having already

wearied the House so long, and being myself, I may unaffectedly say, quite exhausted. If, however, the measures which Her Majesty's Government have to propose are to be carried out—and they are measures which, in my opinion, will conduce greatly to the benefit of this country—it is absolutely necessary we should put our finances in a sound position; and this is what I am most anxious to do. I want to put those finances in such a position and on such principles as shall be most advantageous to the community at large, and not to a class. I beg to observe that I have not even adverted to any particular class. I beg the Committee to recollect the general features of our plan. I have on the part of Her Majesty's Government considered the claims of all those classes which, it is now universally admitted, have been injured by 'recent legislation.' ('No!') Has not the shipping interest been injured by 'recent legislation'—('No!')—and are we not going to afford that interest relief? ('No, no!') I beg to remind the House that I have, on the part of the Government, considered all these claims, and, I hope, in a sound and a kind—I am sure, not in a partial—spirit. I have endeavoured, so far as I possibly could, to make propositions which should terminate those claims of classes, of which, I confess, for one, I am wearied. I have endeavoured to encourage in the House a spirit of legislation which, by creating a general feeling to unite in what may pertain to the public good, and by studying the interest of the community at large, shall show all classes, whether manufacturing, commercial, shipping or agricultural, that in supporting a legislation that seeks the good of the community, they are, in fact, obtaining the stimulus to their own peculiar occupations which they all naturally desire.

Sir, I think on the part of my friends these propositions have been met in a kind and generous spirit. There has been no attempt on their part to parade the unequal incidence of local taxation, which no man can deny they are subject to. No man can deny that there has been a willingness on their part to accept such an inequality in regard to those local charges to which they are subject, in order to arrive at a complete and final settlement of this vexatious question. It is more than

probable, however, that in such measures as may be brought forward more immediately connected with their own interest they will find that advantage and that relief which otherwise they might churlishly have sought to obtain by measures having solely reference to those peculiar burdens to which they have been so long subjected. I think I have witnessed this spirit, and that the tone in which my friends representing more particularly the agricultural interest have met these propositions is one that has shown them to be superior to all petty considerations, and that they are anxious to merge them in a strong national feeling.

Well, Sir, I now feel it my duty to propose some addition to the resources of the country. I will not propose any additional duty on the customs. If we are to embark on a new system, let us do it fairly and completely. I have had proposed to me, and I dare say many persons have had proposed to them, schemes showing how the revenue may be raised by imposing a customs' duty upon articles on which the duty was perhaps precipitately and needlessly repealed. But the repeal of those duties is a part of the system which you have finally adopted, and I will not meddle with such arrangements. So far as any measures which we bring before the House are concerned, we will bring them forward in complete harmony with that great principle of unrestricted competition which the House has adopted, nor will we offer any plan for increasing the revenue which we do not think founded upon the best principles of finance. Neither, Sir, are we going to propose to increase the revenue by means of indirect taxation. I will not now enter into the merits of the customs and the excise as portions of a system of finance; but this I will say, that, although we are compelled to raise a great portion of our revenue by means of indirect taxation, it is absolutely necessary, if you will retain the principle of unrestricted competition, that all indirect taxes should be moderate in amount. Well, Sir, I am not going to propose a new tax. That, at least, is a point in advance; that makes less the difficulties I have to contend with. I am not going to propose a new tax. I am going to ask you to consider an existing tax. I am going to ask you to apply to that con-

sideration the principles you have always supported; and I am going to test you whether you are sincere in the great effort to relieve the industry of this country from that yoke of excessive indirect taxation from which it has suffered so long. I am going to ask the Committee to consider the present arrangement of the house-tax.

Now, Sir, I trust the House will listen to me with kind patience. I know the clamour that has existed in this country about the house-tax. I am not imposing a house-tax. It exists. All I ask you is to consider the principle upon which that tax is constructed. I don't know any portion of the country that has ever made a greater opposition to the house-tax than that portion of it which ought to be the most enlightened and public-spirited portion of the people of this country—that is, the inhabitants of the metropolis. I remember the moment the inhabitants of the metropolis had gained political power they agitated against what they called the iniquitous house-tax. But sound principles of finance were not too prevalent in those days. The inhabitants of the metropolis at that time were subjected to a very heavy taxation, and I don't know that their general complaint against the weight of their taxation was unreasonable. Being suddenly invested with political power, they rose against the immediate object which excited their attention. Remember, the inhabitants of the metropolis were subjected then to an enormous system of direct and indirect taxation. They were subject to direct taxation connected with their houses double in weight to the amount of the house-tax—namely, the window-tax; and, in addition to all this, they were subject to that which they have subsequently told us was infinitely more grievous, infinitely more vexatious, and infinitely more injurious than all taxes—namely, the Corn Laws. Now, just let me remind the House of the real state of affairs as regards the house-tax. Since that time—namely, in 1834—the duty on houses was repealed. It amounted as a revenue to 1,198,000*l*. Since that time the duty on windows has been repealed, amounting to 1,950,000*l*., making altogether the sum of 3,148,000*l*; since that time the duty on glass has been repealed, amounting to 800,000*l*., and 400,000*l*. of which, by the official return I have,



was paid by houses for windows of crown glass. Since then the duty on bricks, amounting to 465,000*l.*, and the duty on timber, to the amount of more than 1,500,000*l.*, have been taken off; and certainly I may say that one-fourth of the duty on timber was contributed by houses. Besides all this, nearly 15,000,000*l.* of indirect taxation have been repealed; and besides all this too, the Corn Laws have been repealed, which so many believed to have been a more grievous kind of taxation than all the other indirect taxation from which they had been relieved.

Well, Sir, I need not say anything, at least to-night, with respect to the justice of the house-tax. The greatest writers have agreed that no tax is more free from objection than the house-tax. I need not say to-night to my predecessor, who, I see, is exhausted as well as myself—I need not say anything to him to prove the excellence and the justice of a house-tax, for he has introduced one himself. But what I would venture to say is, that I cannot believe that when I make a proposition which is only to reconstruct on juster principles—principles which have always been eulogised in this House—an imperfect law, as it at present exists; that when I ask to be permitted to do that in order to carry measures which will relieve to a great extent the industry of the country, and animate in the most conspicuous manner all the great branches of our trade: I cannot think that I shall hear in the year 1852 those objections to a house-tax which were heard in 1834. I believe, indeed, that the persons who were clamorous against the house-tax in 1834 are now men of more enlightened minds—men who have made too much progress in this great age of improvement in which it is our fortune to live, to come forward and say they prefer the old system of finance, which threw the chief burden of taxation on the industry of the country, rather than bear their quota in this great effort for terminating as far as possible the vexed question of taxation. I will recall the attention of the House to the principles on which the present house-tax is established. It is direct taxation—and it is remarkable for all those imperfections which we say direct taxation ought not to be distinguished by. You say with regard to the income-tax that a system of exemptions is intolerable, and you have en-

couraged me this evening in my limited efforts to the adoption of a plan by which exemptions shall be considerably decreased. What, then, can you say to a house-tax which limits its operations to houses of 20*l.* value. I want to know who can possibly defend a law of this kind.

If my honourable friend the member for Montrose (Mr. Hume), who advocates with respect to the income-tax such legitimate conclusions, be sincere, he cannot be in favour of a house-tax limiting its operation and exempting so large a proportion of the subject-matter of it. (Mr. Hume: I divided the House against it.) That is the very thing I want. Three times have I tried to get the honourable gentleman to say that, but I could not. I wanted to hear that from his own lips, because I was afraid some of his new companions might have fallen into the error of supposing that my honourable friend was not in favour of those principles which I am now advocating. But I know my honourable friend is in favour of those principles, and I hope that he will assist me in the temperate and moderate proposition I am making. I think we ought to extend to the house-tax that principle we are attempting to extend to the income-tax. Exemptions are a suspicious feature in all financial systems; and nothing can be more ridiculous than to say that a house which is not rated at 20*l.* a year should be exempted, while a house at 20*l.* a year should pay the tax. Therefore, I think we ought to extend the house-tax; and, in the same spirit in which I would propose any of those measures I have named to-night—not wishing to push the principle to an extreme, but trying to form the public mind by degrees to a system which I am convinced will contribute to their welfare and prosperity—I should say it is not an unreasonable proposition to extend the house-tax to houses of 10*l.* a year. Well, Sir, at present private houses pay 9*d.* in the pound, and shops pay 6*d.* in the pound. The exemption commences at below 20*l.* It is impossible that a house-tax could be proposed with scantier limits. I felt at the time that the tax was proposed, that, both as to the basis upon which it was formed and at the rate at which it was assessed, we were sanctioning (with great respect to my right honourable predecessor I say it) a

very injudicious measure. I remember in the middle of the session I made a feeble effort to arrest its progress, and received the sanction of the right honourable gentleman the member for the University of Oxford (Mr. Gladstone); but it was useless at that time to oppose the measure, though I felt we were sanctioning one we should all some day regret. I think we ought to increase the basis of the tax, and that it would be a moderate proposition if I suggested that its present basis should be extended to houses of 10*l.* a year. I don't mean that we should for ever stop at 10*l.* I do not lay that down as a final proposition; but it is an advance in the right direction, and it is all I can venture at this moment to recommend.

Then, again, I think we ought to increase the rate. We must remember that, if the measures with which this proposition is accompanied are passed, a very great difference will be made in the position of the inhabitant householders; that those who are in trade will have for the first time recognised a difference between realised and precarious incomes in the contribution to the property and income tax—a recognition gratifying to their feelings, as well as advantageous to their interests; that a very great reduction will be effected for them in the price of two of the principal articles of domestic expenditure, by their having cheap beer and cheap tea; and that the changes we propose, if agreed to, will give great impulse to their industry in largely promoting the trade and commerce of the country. Since the public first objected to the house-duty, they have got rid of that duty—they have got rid of the glass-duty, of the brick-duty, and much of the timber-duty; they have been relieved from that immense mass of indirect taxation to which I have referred—from the operation of the Corn Laws, to which many of them objected as the worst taxation of all; and from the window-tax. And now I want to recall to the recollection of the Committee—as important to the equitable adjustment of the question—the circumstances under which the tax on windows was taken off in 1851. That repeal was not asked for by the inhabitants of houses as a relief from the burden of taxation, or because it was a grievous or vexatious tax in a financial point of view. Of course not: as conscientious, honest, honourable men, they

could not put the matter in that light, after they had been relieved from the house-tax, from the brick-tax, timber-tax, glass-tax—from the general mass of indirect taxation I have spoken of—and when, above all, they were revelling in their relief from the Corn Laws. Oh, no! nothing of the sort; they all said that the country was never more prosperous, themselves never more happy, never more contented, and they sought the repeal of the window-tax upon no financial grounds at all. What they urged upon the House, in connection with the subject, was simply and solely the sanitary condition of the people, and they objected to the window-tax, because, they said, it affected the sanitary condition of the people. The allegation was admitted by the House, and the tax was put an end to. Now, if, without affecting the sanitary condition of the people, we could supply the Exchequer by a reconstruction of that house-tax—which they did not seem on principle to object to—by the amount of the contribution which the inhabitants of houses formerly paid in the shape of a window-duty, which they only objected to on sanitary grounds—this cannot, I apprehend, be looked upon as an immoderate proposition. But I do not propose, in the first instance, to go so far even; I do not propose a scheme that shall levy so great a tax on the inhabitants of taxable houses as they paid in the form of window-tax. My proposal is to levy the tax upon an enlarged area, so that whatever may be its amount, its incidence may be lighter. I shall make a moderate proposition, and yet one that will enable us to place the finances of the country on a sound basis. I propose to extend the tax, as I before said, to 10 $\frac{1}{2}$  houses, and that private houses (rated in the whole at 15,854,126 $\frac{1}{2}$ l.) shall be assessed at 1s. 6d., and shops (rated at 10,698,452 $\frac{1}{2}$ l.) shall be assessed at 1s. in the pound, the whole produce being 1,723,000 $\frac{1}{2}$ l.—that is, about one million sterling more than the present produce of the house-tax, and 225,000 $\frac{1}{2}$ l., if I recollect aright, less than the amount of that tax upon windows which was objected to solely on account of its effect on the sanitary condition of the people.

Now, Sir, having made that proposition, I may complete my estimate for the year 1853–54; it having been necessary

for me to enter into these details in the middle of this estimate. I have shown that the extraordinary demand made upon us in 1853 will be 2,100,000*l.*, the extra ways and means 2,500,000*l.* We shall, in this year, have only half the increase of the house-tax, if the House assents to it—so that upon the whole there will be 2,500,000*l.* of extraordinary ways and means to meet an extraordinary expenditure of 2,100,000*l.* As to the year 1854–55, the estimates show a loss on the malt duty of 1,700,000; there will be a loss on tea by the further reduction of 2*d.*—allowing for the increased consumption, which I estimate at 4,000,000 lbs.—there will be a total loss on tea of 567,000*l.*; on hops of 120,000*l.*; by light dues 100,000*l.*; and on the whole, with the increased estimates of which I have spoken, a total sum of 3,087,000*l.* to meet. Now for the ways and means. There will be, I estimate, in 1854–55 a surplus of 1,800,000*l.*, for I cannot conceive there will be any claim then on account of the Kaffir war; repayments will amount to 400,000*l.*; half of the Three-and-a-Quarter Per Cents. will come in (for which benefit we are indebted to the most successful of modern Chancellors of the Exchequer, who had twice the honour of reducing the public debt), 310,000*l.*; and we shall further have the whole of the new house-tax 1,000,000*l.*, making in all a sum of 3,510,000*l.*, or something less than 500,000*l.* more than the deficiency to be supplied; and this, I think, represents a not unfavourable condition of finance.

I have now, Sir, endeavoured to place before the Committee those measures of financial and administrative reform which Her Majesty's Government are prepared at once to bring forward. The honourable member for Montrose seemed to be surprised that no provision was announced with regard to the stamps on marine insurance and charter-parties. I would point out to my honourable friend that this is one of those financial matters which could not be considered as coming within the scope of this preliminary statement. The Government has contented itself on this occasion with propounding those measures which it is prepared, with the sanction of the House, to bring into immediate operation. We have studiously abstained from offering any opinion on any branch of the system

of taxation on which we are not prepared immediately to act. The measures which we have thus announced are essentially practical measures. If the House sanctions them, they will, in our opinion, lay down sound principles of finance which will lead to results highly beneficial to the people of this country, and be the foundation of further measures, which we believe will prove still more beneficial. It does not become us, according to our sense of duty, to offer anything to the House of other than a practical nature, or to make any proposition which we are not prepared, with the sanction of the House, to carry immediately into effect. At the same time, we have not neglected carefully to examine the question of the stamp duties and the probate duties; and we think it not impossible to bring forward, on the right occasion, a duty on successions that will reconcile contending interests, and terminate the system now so much complained of. At present, however, we are not prepared with a measure of that kind, and we consider it, as I have said, altogether injudicious to propound any project to the House which we are not ready at once to act upon.

We think we have proposed enough to-night; and we think that what we have proposed is of a character that, if acted upon, we can judiciously advance a step further. I admit that what I have now proposed is only a first step, but I trust the Committee will admit it to be a step in the right direction; we have met the great question in a large and comprehensive spirit, fully prepared, if the House will support us, to carry out the policy which I have to-night—most inadequately, I am aware—indicated to the Committee: a policy which we believe will be for the welfare of the country, because it is a policy founded on sound principles of finance, and because it has been framed with no other object than to govern the country in a manner that shall most conduce to the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

REPLY, December 16, 1852.<sup>1</sup>

[This speech attracted considerable attention at the time, and the assertion at the close of it, that 'England does not love coalitions,' has passed into a household word.] It was thought that Government, in spite of the circumstances already mentioned, might have had a majority, but for the speech of Mr. Gladstone which followed—one of the few instances, if the supposition be correct, of a speech determining the division.]

THE Chancellor of the Exchequer: Sir, after four nights of criticism, conducted by some of the most considerable reputations in this House, on the financial propositions that I have laid on the table of the Committee, I now rise to vindicate those propositions. If in the observations, which I will endeavour to condense as much as I can, I omit noticing any of the objections which have been urged against those propositions, I hope the Committee will ascribe that negligence to inadvertence and not to design. Having listened with the respect and attention naturally due to such words from such lips, I can conscientiously say that I have heard nothing that in my opinion has successfully impugned the policy which, as the organ of the Government, I have recommended; and I am prepared to meet the objections which have been urged, and to show to the Committee that they are unfounded and illusory. When, with the great indulgence of the House on Friday week, I attempted to make a general exposition of the financial policy of the Government; when, exhausting, I am conscious, the patience of the House, as well as myself, I endeavoured in the fulfilment of my duty to give—I will not call them estimates—but to give such information as was necessary as to the

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

effect of the alterations that we proposed on the revenue of the next year and the year immediately following—I did not then attempt to substantiate that statement by details. I felt that at that moment the House was too exhausted to listen to those details; I felt that the general statement would undergo the scrutiny of persons competent to invalidate its accuracy if inaccuracy could be proved to exist; and I felt I should have the opportunity, with permission of the House, of answering such criticisms in due time. I will now, therefore, in the first place, address myself to the statement which I made generally as to the effect of these alterations on the revenue of the two years under discussion; and I will apply myself, in the first instance, to the two important arraignments of the policy which we recommend, made principally by the right honourable gentleman the member for Halifax (Sir Charles Wood). And, first, I will address myself to that sum of 400,000*l.*, which, under the name of repayments, I recommend to the Committee to adopt and to sanction as part of the ways and means of the impending year. That proposed course was at once denounced by the member for the University of Oxford, and afterwards assailed in language and a tone somewhat unusual—certainly not very Parliamentary—by the right honourable member for Halifax; for, instead of addressing his observations to you, Sir, he addressed, throughout his speech, his observations to myself. On a subsequent occasion another right honourable gentleman—a great authority in this House (Sir James Graham)—entered amply, and with the advantage which days of meditation on the subject gave him, into the same topic, enlarging upon it with a minuteness which was not observed in the attack of the member for the University of Oxford, and which was scorned by the member for Halifax.

These three great authorities have combined to influence the opinion of the Committee on the subject. I am not sure whether a third ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer<sup>1</sup> has touched on it, for, unfortunately, I was absent from the House during part of the time he was addressing the Committee—probably, however, he did not spare me any more than his right honour-

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Goulburn, Chancellor of the Exchequer under Sir Robert Peel.



able friends have done. It is for me now to show—if the Committee will, as I have no doubt, after these attacks, it will, give me its kind and patient attention—that the propositions I made bear a very different character and complexion from those which these authorities have so strenuously sought to induce the Committee to believe. There are two points in this subject before the Committee: first, was I justified in recommending that the establishment in question should be abolished? Secondly, if I was justified in that recommendation, was I justified in also recommending that the repayments should take their place in the ways and means. These are the two issues in this matter before the Committee; I trust I have stated them fairly. I must advert briefly to the origin of this department of the Public Works Loan Commission, to which on the former occasion I alluded cursorily. I observed then that this department had its origin in circumstances exactly the reverse of those under which it now exists, and that it was occasioned by causes which now no longer operate. At the peace, there being surplus population and deficient capital, the labour market throughout the country being suddenly disturbed, and unexpected hands let loose on society, the amount of unemployed labour being increased and aggravated by a body of 200,000 seamen and soldiers all at once disbanded, the Government of that day felt it necessary to take some artificial means of employing that surplus labour in a state of society where capital was deficient.

It is not necessary for us to enter into any discussion as to the policy or impolicy of such a proceeding. Probably mere political economists might not approve of it—probably statesmen under circumstances so urgent, though they might not have abstractedly approved of it, might have been forced to have recourse to such a measure. However this may be, a department was established which, by the credit of Exchequer bills issued by the State, raised money, and employed that money in what is called ‘public works.’ That system went on for, I think, nearly fifteen years. Nearly 3,000,000*l.* of Exchequer bills had been issued, and those which had been so issued for that purpose were not of so favourite a character in

the market as the usual Supply Exchequer Bills, and it was found necessary or convenient to terminate the issue. In the year 1842, the point from which we depart, the account was taken of that fund. It appeared at that time that in round numbers the sum of 3,000,000*l.* had been raised by Exchequer bills thus issued; that of that sum 2,000,000*l.* had been paid off, and that 1,046,000*l.* remained at that time unsettled, if I may use the expression, and to close the transaction they were funded. From that period, by Act of Parliament it was arranged that, instead of loans raised on Exchequer bills, the same Commissioners for the same purpose should receive a sum of money to the amount of 360,000*l.* a year from the Consolidated Fund. The sum which we have actually to deal with is 300,000*l.* per annum, for by a subsequent arrangement 60,000*l.*, a portion of that sum, was transferred to the use of Ireland only for public works, and with that we do not propose to deal.

Well now, Sir, the member for Carlisle<sup>1</sup> has dilated in almost moving terms upon the benefit of the loan fund, especially to the country gentlemen. He has eulogised its good administration by the unpaid commissioners, whose respectable and respected names he read to the Committee; nor should he have forgotten—though he omitted it, I am sure, only from inadvertence—to have recorded, also, the names of the respected officers connected with that fund, whose performance of their duties should not, I think, be overlooked at this moment, whatever our opinion may be upon other subjects. I am willing to admit that so far as those unpaid commissioners and those sedulous officials are concerned, there are few blots in the administration of that fund, during a long period, by them. On the contrary, I think I may say that they have conducted themselves with unimpeachable assiduity and care. Sir, the right honourable gentleman passing on, has dilated upon the importance of this fund, especially to the country gentlemen. With this fund, according to him, bridges have been erected, union workhouses built, lunatic asylums and public gaols have risen. (Sir J. Graham: I said ‘workhouses enlarged,’ not ‘built.’) Well, enlarged; the right honourable gentleman may

<sup>1</sup> Sir James Graham.

have the benefit of the correction. Certainly he talked of this fund circulating to the constant advantage of the landed interest, and he asked, 'If that assistance is withdrawn, what are they to do?' 'Why has he touched it?' said the right honourable gentleman with indignation; 'not a single shilling has been lost; why has he touched it?'

Now, Sir, of funds of this nature there is one general observation to make, which before we enter into the consideration to its particular management should not be omitted. This fund proposed to lend money at a higher rate of interest than the rate prevailing in what is called 'the money market.' According to the member for Halifax, that was in order that the money market should not be disturbed. The rules of the Loan Fund were these: that for all undertakings in which profit was concerned, 5 per cent. was to be charged; and for all undertakings in which profit was not concerned, 4 per cent. only was to be charged. The first and natural consequence of any department lending money at a higher rate of interest than the natural rate of the money market is, that first-rate securities will not apply to them; for first-rate securities will not pay 5 per cent., or 4 per cent. if they can get their money at  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent.; and if your funds are employed, the chance is that your security is second-rate. Well, Sir, I have here ample information as to the manner in which those funds were employed as regards the country gentlemen, but I have no wish to enter into any details to show that in many instances those advances need not or ought not to have been made. At this moment the country gentlemen are not applying for any great amount of that fund, for the reason which my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department adverted to the other evening—namely, that they cannot afford to pay so high a rate of interest for the loan which is afforded them. But, Sir, the objection to this department has nothing to do with the circumstances on the surface, to which the member for Carlisle has adverted, and to which he has confined himself. The question is one of a much deeper character; and now perhaps the Committee will permit me to inform them under what circumstances and by what reason my attention was drawn to this Loan Fund.

Sir, I found in revising the public accounts of the country a department, and a department of no great mark, with a very large balance of the public money unemployed, amounting, when it first attracted my attention—and, I believe, at this moment—to upwards of 380,000*l.*, lying perfectly idle. It is no doubt a rule, which I should think no gentleman opposite will impugn, that large balances of the public money lying idle is a circumstance which ought not to be encouraged, and which ought to be inquired into. But I found that with that large amount of balance there was a law in existence that peremptorily every quarter of a year increased it by the sum of 90,000*l.* less the amount paid to Ireland, and it became, therefore, my duty to inquire why so large a balance remained unproductive, what was the object of that balance, what had been effected by that fund, and what might be the consequences of its remaining in its present state? The right honourable baronet said, in a manner which he did not in any way qualify—which, in fact, was almost the basis of his appeal, if not his argument—that not a single shilling had been lost; that under the innocent management of those respected names which he appealed to, and those worthy officials whose services I have presumed to notice, the simple country gentlemen have been benefited; that that recruiting fund had raised our gaols, and enlarged our unions, and, after thirty or forty years' experience, not a single shilling, mind you, has been lost. 'Why does he touch it?' Now, I must inform the Committee that the right honourable gentleman, in the minute statement which he gave with respect to this department, omitted all the most important facts.

I doubt not, Sir, that if a fund had been entrusted only to respectable unpaid commissioners of such habits of life as were referred to by the right honourable gentleman, devoted only to the worthy and laudable purposes which the right honourable gentleman described as the sole object of its investment—I doubt not that, though there might have been an occasional job *unconsciously perpetrated, and an occasional bad security inadvertently taken*, yet that no very serious consequences would have accrued. But, Sir, with so convenient a fund at their disposal, there was another party to interfere beside the

respectable commissioners, and the fund has been employed for purposes very different from those of my honourable friend near me, the country gentlemen of England. With these large balances and funds another influence has interfered, very briefly alluded to by one of those right honourable gentlemen who have spoken on the subject. 'We all know how convenient it may be to the minister,' said the right honourable gentleman (Sir C. Wood), 'to have at a particular moment such a fund at his command;' and I will show the Committee how convenient it has been to the minister to have such a fund at his command, and I will show to the Committee what flagrant misappropriation there has been of the public funds of this country, and how vast an amount has been squandered away, virtually without the cognisance and consent of Parliament, and entirely by the machinery of this Public Works Loan Fund. Now, Sir, 'it is excessively convenient,' says the right honourable gentleman. There are moments when even I, with my brief experience of office, which seems so much envied—when, he says, even I may have experienced the conveniences of such a fund. Well, I don't know what I may come to; but certainly, during the short period I have had the honour of presiding over the Exchequer, I had not the slightest idea that I was to avail myself of such an opportunity. This, now, is the way my predecessors have availed themselves of such opportunities. I shall then put the question simply to the Committee, whether they think that such a department ought to be maintained for the reasons urged by the right honourable member for Carlisle, or whether I have taken a judicious course in attempting to terminate its existence. That is what I shall leave to the decision of the Committee.

Now, Sir, let me explain how the minister of the day—I make no charge on any minister of any period: my observations are general—how the minister of the day has availed himself of the public funds, virtually, as I shall show you, without the cognisance of Parliament, and how vast sums have been squandered without even the honourable member for Montrose, I believe, being aware of it. Now, I take one among many illustrative instances. I take the instance of the Thames Tunnel.

There was a body of ingenious men who resolved to make a tunnel under the Thames. Well, it was a great triumph of scientific enterprise, and much to the honour of the English character that such an undertaking should have been entered into without, of course, the slightest chance of ever getting the smallest interest for their money. It is only in England that such things are undertaken and such enterprises encouraged. However, there are moments when even the most enthusiastic in such enterprises begin to think that public assistance is required. Appeals are made to the minister. Those appeals are strengthened and supported by powerful Parliamentary influence. A Bill is brought into Parliament on a subject which interests nobody, and it allows the undertakers of that public enterprise, the members of a public company, to raise money. Who of the 650 members has his eye on a Bill of that kind? Probably not five men in the House, unless they are the directors of the company, are aware of it. That Bill contains a clause permitting the Lords of the Treasury to advance from the Public Works Loan Fund a sum by way of loan to carry out the projects of that company. The Bill is passed. Being passed, the promoters go to the Treasury—I am now speaking of the Thames Tunnel Company—they go to the Treasury. By virtue of that clause the Lords of the Treasury advance, by way of loan, through the machinery of the Public Works Loan Fund, no less a sum than 250,000*l.* to the Thames Tunnel Company, not a shilling of which has ever been repaid, or can ever be repaid, and on which, I believe, only  $\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. interest, received probably as an admission fee into the tunnel, has ever been paid.

Now, what I say with regard to the system is this. It is perfectly open to the House of Commons to do that which all assemblies and individuals have a right to do—to commit a great folly. If a minister comes forward and asks the House of Commons to vote 250,000*l.* to make a tunnel under the Thames, if we assent to his proposal, we have at least the glory of voting 250,000*l.* for that object, and though some may think that 250,000*l.* might be employed for a more useful or elevating purpose, at least an opportunity is given of appealing to the

reason of the House and dissenting from the measure. But under this system no one is in the least aware that 250,000*l.* is advanced. It is lent. Yes, but how lent? It is a grant in the shape of a loan. Now, this is one of the cases by which 250,000*l.* and its accumulated interest have been lost to the country. I will give one more instance of the operation of this Loan Fund, and it is one of recent interest. I am ashamed to say that I have been a member of Parliament during the time in which this instance occurred, and I dare say a majority now in the House were. Its date is from 1847 to 1850, and it makes me blush even at this moment. Now, this case is well deserving the attention of the Committee, because there is no reason why almost this very night, or the next night, the same operation may not be going on; there is not the least reason why under this machinery we may not every week be voting 100,000*l.* of the public money without a single member being cognisant of it. The case which I will now call your attention to is that of Battersea Park. Now, Sir, I am far from saying that it may not be the duty of the Government to establish parks for the health and enjoyment of the community. I do not want to enter into that question now, though perhaps I may observe, in respect to the establishment of a park, that it may fairly be considered whether the inhabitants of the district should not at least contribute their quota, and in that case whether it may not be perfectly legitimate in a great metropolis like this, that the central authority should aid in a purpose which contributes to the ornament of the capital, and the health of the general population. It is perfectly legitimate for the minister to come forward and propose a vote of 150,000*l.* or more if necessary, to make a park at Battersea, or anywhere else. The House, in such an event, has the question fairly before it, and may consider it in all its details, and if it sanction it, although the speculation may be improvident, and the object not worth the investment, yet no one can complain of the result.

Let me inform the Committee what occurred in the case of Battersea Park. A Bill was brought into Parliament, as usual, empowering certain individuals to buy land at Battersea and to

make a park. A clause was put into the Bill—not compulsory, mind you, but permissive—to enable the Lords of the Treasury if they thought fit, to advance from the Public Works Loan Fund such a sum as they might think proper for the advancement of the object in question. The proprietors of Battersea Park, with that Bill which nobody had ever seen, and that clause—(Sir C. Wood: ‘It was a public Bill’)—yes, a public Bill, of course, but it does not follow that five persons in the House knew of its existence—they go to the Treasury, and what occurs? They obtain an advance from the Treasury of 150,000*l*. I don’t ask who was the Chancellor of the Exchequer who sanctioned that allowance, notwithstanding the recent interruption. Of all the speculations that man engaged in, no speculation was so absurd as Battersea Park. The persons who undertook the enterprise were ignorant of all the circumstances with which they had to deal. They purchased a great deal of land, and made arrangements by which twenty years must elapse, even if they were successful, before they receive any rents; and the margin reserved for the Government is so slight that, instead of repaying the principal, it will probably never defray the sum that is already due for accumulated interest; for, mind you, they are in theory paying 5 per cent. to the Public Works Loan Fund all this time. The interest is debited every half year, and the arrears now amount, I think, to 12,000*l*. Now, Sir, I will not go into any other instances. I have done my duty in bringing these before the Committee.

I have here in my hand, from the year 1824 till 1840, a catalogue of parallel instances, and the whole amount is very little short of 700,000*l*., every shilling of which has been lost to the country. ‘Not a single shilling has been lost,’ said the right honourable gentleman (Sir J. Graham). ‘Why has he touched it?’ Well, I’ve given him now the ‘reason why,’<sup>1</sup> and I think the Committee will agree, whatever they may think of the

<sup>1</sup> This is a reference to a speech of Sir J. Graham’s on the advantages which various classes of the population had derived from the recent measures of commercial legislation. The *refrain* of several sentences was, ‘And they know the reason why.’



further merits of the question, that in stopping a system so iniquitous, I was only doing my duty as a guardian of the public purse. Yet this is the system which, according to the right honourable gentleman, is so beneficially administered by Lord Overstone, by which loans are advanced to country gentlemen for building lunatic asylums at 4 per cent. In fact, irrespective of the flagrant circumstances which I have brought before the Committee, time had virtually done that for the Public Works Loan Fund which an indignant Chancellor of the Exchequer ought to have done long ago. A loan fund at 4 and 5 per cent. founded upon the assumption that there was surplus labour and deficient capital, in an age when there was a deficiency of labour and a plethora of capital, really had come to its natural end; and that is the cause of those large balances which must necessarily be swollen each quarter by the increment from the Exchequer. They have, in fact, with the rapidly accumulating funds been led almost to force their loans upon Irish railways; but here the unpaid commissioners come into play, and take care that the security shall be of the best description. And, therefore, that has happened within a very recent period which will perhaps astonish the House; but such is the effect of the present, and I believe the permanent, state of the money market, that an Irish railway company that had asked for the assistance of a very large sum have just announced they will not accept the money granted by the Loan Fund, because they find, having a good security, they can obtain assistance in the ordinary way at a more reasonable rate.

Under these circumstances I felt it my duty to bring before the attention of my colleagues the state of this department; and I called to their notice that not only was there this waste of public money, but there was no security that the waste would not indefinitely continue. That waste, too, has taken place during a period of years when you have not been able to screw up your courage to vote 150,000*l.* for a National Gallery; and we came to the conclusion that it would be a good thing to relieve the Consolidated Fund of this annual charge, and stop the machinery by which such ruinous waste of the public

money took place. Then the question arose, What were we to do with the repayments to this Fund which would every year come in when the issue was stopped, and which repayments I placed in my estimate at 400,000*l.*? The right honourable gentleman the member for the University of Cambridge seemed to correct me as to the repayments being 360,000*l.*; but he confounded the amount of issue from the Consolidated Fund with the repayments in a way that, with his experience as Chancellor of the Exchequer, somewhat surprised me. The fact is that the annual amount issued from the Consolidated Fund is no measure of the amount of repayments. But the question arose, What were we to do with these repayments? Were we to pay this 400,000*l.* into the balances of the Exchequer? That was the first question. It is, no doubt, of the utmost importance that the balances in the Exchequer should be high. That is a very great principle. But, after all, the balances in the Exchequer are nothing more than the balances of the nation with its bankers; and the same rule must apply to a nation with its banker as to a private individual with his banker. Whether you bank with Messrs. Drummond or with the Bank of England, neither would allow you any interest on your balances. It is necessary, therefore, for the nation, as for a private individual, to have a good, ample, and sufficient balance; but it is inexpedient, it is unwise, to have an excessive balance, and the consequence has been that the highest authorities, those most favourable to retaining a sufficient balance in the Exchequer have laid down what may be considered rules for the amount of such balance. There is a certain point which it is considered inexpedient that the balance in the Exchequer should surmount.

The state of your balances in the Exchequer is this: they have long ago arrived at that point; at present they exceed it, and have done so for some time. Ever since 1842, with the exception of one year of startling and unexpected vicissitudes, the balances in the Exchequer have been very high, and higher than recommended by the best authorities. The proof is that, with the exception of 1848, never, from the period I have mentioned, has there been any occasion to borrow money, to receive any accommodation from the Bank of England for the

current expenses of the State—that is to say, at the end of every quarter, when the dividends were about to be paid, there has always been in the Bank a balance sufficient to discharge the claims of the public creditor, and leave a sum ample enough for all the contingencies of the national expenditure. Since 1849—with one exception, when I think a sum of 400*l.* or 500*l.* was paid for deficiency bills, and that only from a technical mistake—the Government has never, in fact, been under the necessity of appealing to the Bank for advances. The Committee, then, will understand that if the 400,000*l.* in question had been paid in to the balances of the Exchequer, it would in the present state of affairs have been just the same as locking up that sum in an iron chest; it would have been immovable and unprofitable.

I must ask the indulgence of the Committee while I enter into these details. Treasury finance is a subject with which the House is not very conversant, but I hope the House will not think me presumptuous in attempting to instruct them upon it. My own knowledge on the subject is of course recent. I was not born and bred a Chancellor of the Exchequer—I am one of the Parliamentary rabble; but I trust, after all the observations that have been made, I may be permitted to show that I have not neglected to render myself acquainted with these affairs. One thing, I think, is quite clear. It is quite clear that the right honourable gentleman the member for Halifax is not in favour of this 400,000*l.* being paid in to the balances of the Exchequer, because I have shown you that when brought into the Exchequer it is unprofitable; but the right honourable gentleman says, ‘The proper thing to do with it is this—it ought to go to reduce the debt.’ And the right honourable gentleman the member for the University of Cambridge echoes that—and I am glad to hear that admission, because the Government think the same. 1,000,000*l.* debt was created by funding Loan Exchequer Bills in 1812, and therefore, say the right honourable baronet and the right honourable gentleman, you ought to reduce the debt, both therefore being against this sum being paid in to the balances of the Exchequer.

Now, let us examine this question of the reduction of the debt. Upon this subject there is some misapprehension prevalent in this House. I have been asked myself, 'What do you leave for the reduction of the debt? In your financial statement you have left nothing.' Sir, the mode, method and means by which the Sinking Fund acts, and the public debt of the country is liquidated, do not depend on the will of the minister, or even upon a vote of the House of Commons; they are provided for by legislation. The law has prescribed the method by which you reduce the public debt of this country. There is, in fact, only one way of acting by the Sinking Fund, and the law has prescribed this—I beg the attention of the House, because this is a vital point of my argument—the law, I say, prescribes that every quarter of the financial year, an account shall be taken of our income and expenditure at the Treasury, and in case a surplus shall be ascertained to exist, one-fourth of that surplus shall be instantly devoted to the liquidation of the public debt by the agency of the Sinking Fund. It is not left to the discretion of the minister, or of a single House of Parliament; the law is inexorable and imperative. It is impossible to reduce the debt, unless you bring your resources into the ways and means. It is only by such a process that they can enter into the balance struck of income and expenditure, and that the surplus can be ascertained, and one-fourth of that surplus appropriated to the reduction of the debt. And now I will show you how we propose to act on the debt in the way in which we have recommended Parliament to deal with this 400,000*l.* of repayments.

The House will assume, for the sake of argument, that the surplus for the coming year is an accurate estimate. Well then, the account of income and expenditure is taken at the Treasury at the end of the first quarter of the financial year; and the surplus being 400,000*l.*, one fourth of that is immediately devoted to the reduction of the debt by the action of the law. The same process takes place every three months—the same action takes place on the same surplus of 400,000*l.* and thus at the end of the year the whole of the 400,000*l.* is devoted to the reduction of this debt. And, therefore, in three

years' time, all things remaining the same, and the repayments entering into the Treasury, the whole of that sum of funded Exchequer bills of 1,046,000*l.* and the accumulated interest, will be liquidated, and the public debt reduced by that amount. There is no other way of acting on the public debt or reducing it; the course we propose to take is the only one that can be taken in the case; there is no alternative—the law has so decided it. By the course, then, we have recommended, we have in the first place put an end to a disastrous waste of public money. In the second place, we have relieved the Consolidated Fund from an annual payment of 300,000*l.*; and in the third place, we have laid the foundation of a reduction of the public debt at least to the amount of 1,000,000*l.* funded, and all its accumulations. The question, I apprehend, assumes a very different character after this explanation. But this is only a narrative of the conduct of the Government. Let us see what great authorities have said on this subject. Hitherto, as I have put the case, the House may be of opinion that we have acted discreetly but unprecedentedly. After the criticisms I have been subjected to, let me inform the House what was the opinion on the subject of the highest authorities. In 1822 a Select Committee was appointed to inquire into the public accounts, and to recommend the means by which the keeping of those accounts might be improved; and to that committee we are indebted, with scarcely any exception, for all the forms of public accounts that now prevail. What was the recommendation of the committee of 1822 with regard to these advances and repayments? That committee, formed of the most distinguished men, concentrating their attention upon this sole subject, specifically recommended that all advances and repayments should enter into the account of income and expenditure; and for six years the advances and repayments so figure in the public accounts. It may be said that there was another Select Committee on Public Accounts in 1828, and that they took a different view. That would not invalidate the high authority of the committee of 1822; it would not deprive us of the authority that the course we have taken is not unprecedented, because I have proved it was practised for six years. But let

us inquire what was the opinion of the committee of 1828. They certainly did recommend that it would be more convenient that advances and repayments should be kept in separate accounts from those of the income and expenditure. But I am informed by a distinguished member of the committee, that that recommendation did not arise from any adoption of the opinions now maintained on this subject by right honourable gentlemen opposite; and they added this to their recommendation, that, whenever an issue was stopped and the account closed, then the general account was to be taken, and the repayments were to revert to their old position in the public accounts. So even the committee of 1828 sanctioned the principle recommended by the committee of 1822, so far as payments and receipts were concerned. But in 1829, a law was passed which deprived ministers of any discretion on this head; and the only way the Act of 10 George IV. c. 12, operates on the reduction of the debt—the only way a minister can act in the reduction of the debt—is by bringing in, according to the recommendation of the Select Committee of 1822, the repayments under accounts closed to ways and means. It is painful to have to refer to these comparatively small matters, when matters of so much greater importance are before the Committee; but I hope that every member will admit that, after the speeches we have heard, it is due to the Government, to the party I have the honour to represent, and to the House, that I should go into these details, and state clearly the circumstances before us, and vindicate, as I hope I have done, the course which we recommend.

Well, Sir, I now approach the second grand arraignment of my financial statement, by the right honourable gentleman the member for Halifax (Sir Charles Wood)—that is, the alleged mistake made in the estimates for the year after next, as to the loss which will accrue to the revenue from the proposed semi-repeal of the malt-duty. The House will recollect that I estimated the loss which would accrue in the year 1854–55 from the alteration in the malt-duty at 1,700,000*l*. Assuming that the amount of duty remitted would be about 2,500,000*l*., and taking of course the most depreciatory view of the result

of the reduction of duty, the member for Halifax placed the amount derived from increased consumption as low as 200,000*l.* and he added, 'With 200,000*l.* obtained by the repeal of your Scotch drawback, the total loss will be 2,100,000*l.*' (Sir Charles Wood: I gave you credit for 400,000*l.*.) That is what I have just stated. He said I took the increased consumption at 800,000*l.*, which he described as preposterous—and altogether fictitious. Let us, however, Sir, examine the facts; let us see what they are. When I brought under the consideration of the Committee the subject of the repeal of the malt-tax, I said that the Government had followed in their treatment of that tax the recommendation of the Royal Commission of Excise Inquiry, presided over by Sir H. Parnell, in 1832. The recommendation of that committee was, that in case there was ever free trade in barley, one-half the malt-tax should be repealed, and that the Scotch and Irish drawbacks should be terminated. In the interval since that commission sat, the Irish have voluntarily renounced their drawback. The commissioners further recommended that, when free trade in barley was established, and the malt-tax was reduced to one-half, an end should be put to the enormous system of credit given to maltsters. I said that, although we wished to follow the recommendation of those eminent men the members of the Excise Commission as nearly as possible, we thought it important, in regard to the recommendation as to the reduction of the credit given to the maltsters, that the trade should not be disturbed, although we felt that the whole system was vicious in principle and pernicious in practice, and that it was necessary to make some considerable change. That subject has been under our consideration. Our object has been to put an end to, or to modify, a system which grew out of circumstances totally different from those of the age in which we live, and, while we replaced the conduct of the trade upon a more healthy and satisfactory basis, not to disturb the trade. But the effect of the new arrangement we propose as to this credit, though in our opinion it will not in any way disturb the trade, will have an immediate influence upon the revenue. In the year 1854–55 there will be a sum of 600,000*l.* paid to the revenue, which, if this

system of credit were not reformed, would not be obtained. Now, what did I do under these circumstances? Assuming that the numerical loss from the semi-repeal of the malt-tax would be 2,500,000*l.*, I deducted from that amount the sum just stated, as regards the year 1854–55. That reduced the numerical loss to 1,900,000*l.* Then the sum of 200,000*l.* obtained by the repeal of the Scotch drawback would further reduce it to 1,700,000*l.* As I was not making a formal estimate to the House, and dealing with a time so remote, I would not make any allowance for that increased consumption which was admitted by the right honourable gentleman. If I had made an allowance for the increased consumption, according to his estimate, the loss for the year 1854–55, instead of 1,700,000*l.*, would have been only 1,500,000*l.*; but if I had made an allowance according to the estimate which was given me by the highest authorities in the trade it would have reached a much lower sum. But as I have never offered any estimate, since I have had the honour of addressing this House, which has not, I hope, been prudent and moderate, I refrained altogether from taking the influence of increased consumption into calculation; otherwise I might have fairly described the estimated surplus of 1854–55 at 800,000*l.* instead of 400,000*l.*

The member for the University of Cambridge next advanced, and he disputed the accuracy of my estimate of the amount of drawback payable in October to the maltsters. He wanted to know on what data that estimate was framed. Well, Sir, I will tell him. After all, there is only one way of carrying on the public business. When a question of this kind arises, we must obtain the best information that we can get from the most authentic quarters, and must exercise our own judgment upon the facts which are placed before us. Well, Sir, the highest authorities—men whose information upon this subject is unequalled, and whose intelligence and integrity of character are indisputable—these, the highest authorities, united in recommending me to take one-third of the stock as the amount upon which I should have to pay drawback on October 10; that is, one-sixth of the duty—and the sum I was recommended to take, as a very safe estimate of the amount of drawback



calculated by those who are perfectly acquainted with the trade, was 880,000*l.* Well, according to my habit, I estimated the amount of drawback at 1,000,000*l.* and these are the numerals which have excited the indignant rhetoric of the member for the University.

‘But why fix the 10th of October?’ said the honourable and learned member for Kidderminster (Mr. Lowe). ‘Here is a plot,’ said the honourable gentleman; ‘if we can only find out why the Government fix upon the 10th of October, we shall be able at once to penetrate these financial mystifications.’ That honourable gentleman is an accession to our debates—he has shown, on the rare occasions on which he has addressed the House, considerable information; but there is, certainly, one subject on which his knowledge has been most conspicuous, and that is—brewing. I am surprised that an honourable gentleman who seemed so complete a master of that art, and who made so eloquent a defence of the system of credit to maltsters, should, of all men, be the person to ask why we fixed upon the 10th of October for bringing into operation the half-repeal of the malt-tax. Now, I had calculated that if I should be as successful with regard to my resolutions as I could possibly expect to be, it was not probable that the resolution upon the malt-tax would pass before March; but the policy which I announced and recommended in December would, if I had not proposed a drawback, have completely paralysed the trade. Every maltster in the country would have stopped his operations. It was necessary I should announce that the Government would allow a drawback on stock-in-hand, and the consequence is that the trade goes on just as usual. The honourable gentleman who possessed such remarkable information on the subject of brewing and malting ought to know that by far the greater amount of duty which is charged, and upon which the usual credit is given for 1853–54, is charged between the months of October and April. Malting virtually ceases at the end of May. From May to October malting does not go on, but there is something that does go on, and that is brewing. The brewer acts upon the stock of the maltster; and therefore when you have to pay the drawback, you pay it under the most advantageous circumstances

in paying it at the period when the stock-in-hand is most reduced, and when the malting season again commences. In fixing the 10th of October, then, I fixed a date recommended by those best acquainted with the subject with which I was dealing. That is my answer to the inquiry of the honourable gentleman.

Sir, I do not like to revert to a subject to which I have already referred ; but I have just remembered that the honourable member for Kidderminster said that he should look to me in my reply to notice the instance of the mortgage which he adduced as a parallel illustrative of the fallacy of my proposition respecting the 400,000*l.* repayments. Now, in deference to his challenge, I beg to offer him a parallel more apposite than his own. I will suppose the case of a careful father of a family, who every three months takes account of his expenditure and income, and devotes one-fourth of his surplus to the payment of his debts, a portion of those debts being incurred by advances to his son ; but the son, when he makes the repayments for these advances, makes them into the hands of a banker, by whom no interest is given, so the father, instead of allowing the money to lie idly there, takes it into his general account, and when he strikes his quarterly balance applies the repayments as part of his surplus to the reduction of his debts. That is my answer to the case of the honourable gentleman, and I humbly deem my instance an exacter parallel than his own. Then there is another subject upon which the honourable and learned member for Kidderminster is a great authority, and that not only here, but I suspect elsewhere. According to the honourable gentleman, the Kaffir war has broken out again. Now, I made a statement to the House a fortnight ago respecting the prospects of extraordinary expenditure with regard to the Kaffir war. I formed my opinion on the Kaffir war—with great deference to the despatches which are received by my right honourable friend the Secretary of State—from the despatches which are forwarded to my own department from a branch of the service under my immediate supervision—I mean the commissariat department, a branch of the service which deals entirely with the extraordinary expenditure under the

control of the Treasury. Whatever the result may be, it is my duty to express my belief that the public funds were never more ably administered than by those who have regulated the extraordinary expenditure of the Kaffir war in the commissariat department. That department communicates directly with the Treasury, and although these despatches naturally confine themselves mainly to the question of expenditure, there is a great deal of valuable information conveyed in them to the Government in a less formal manner than in the despatches received in other quarters. Well, upon the information which I have thus received, which has never yet deceived me, which has justified me, at the commencement of the year, in not calling upon the House to confirm their vote of 200,000*l.*, I made the statement the other night, that I believed the Kaffir war was terminated. We have had more recent information; and I can truly say that all the information that has reached me has entirely substantiated the statement I made upon the previous authority. I have no hesitation in saying, the Kaffir war is terminated. The best evidence I have is, that the commissariat department who are dealing with the extraordinary expenditure, the only one that figures in our estimate, are winding up their extraordinary accounts; and they have announced to me that, except for some casualties which are always liable to occur in any account, they will not trouble me for any further advances. They also give incidental details of the state of the country, which convince me that the war is finished.

In a war with a savage country you cannot have peace suddenly and precisely ascertained, as you may with a nation with which you can enter into a treaty, or where you can take the capital, or where some incident occurs which convinces all the inhabitants that the struggle is over. A sort of flickering ember there may be, and to the last an officer may be shot, or some straggling assassination may occur; but that the Kaffirs can now bring any force into the field, I believe the Committee may be satisfied is impossible. It is not that several chiefs have surrendered—these things have happened before; it is not that the Waterkloof is cleared—though that is important; but it is that in the bush, in the Amatolas, skeletons of the Kaffirs are

found; it is clear that they have no means of subsistence: they are lingering in the bush and dying. The same ship that brought me the information on which I formed my opinion, of course brought despatches to the Secretary of State, and here is a despatch of General Cathcart. I will read a paragraph from it, if the Committee wish: it is strictly in keeping with the subject; we are vindicating the estimates, and I rather think I ought to do so. It is dated from Graham's Town, October 12, 1852:—

‘By this report, and other events which are detailed in my despatch respecting British Kaffraria, you will perceive that the war or rebellion, may now be considered at an end; and as it has been attained, not by any compromise or treaty, but by force of arms, and a severe moral lesson, by the dispersion and expulsion of the most powerful tribe from the natural strongholds which they long believed to be impregnable, cannot fail to impress upon those who are conscious of their inferiority in respect to these natural advantages, the ultimate ruin and destruction that must be the result of rebellious opposition to Her Majesty's authority; and there is reason to hope, provided that authority be duly supported by an adequate permanent military establishment (Sir W. Molesworth: Hear, hear!), that any similar protracted and expensive Kaffrarian war may be long averted.’

I read that because it is a definite announcement. With regard to the ‘adequate military establishment,’ the honourable baronet need not be alarmed; it will be very moderate; we shall depend upon the mounted police, which is a colonial force, paid for of course by the colony—a colony with a free constitution. Colonies with constitutions will, I apprehend, always be ready to defray the expense of self-defence. The head-quarters of General Cathcart are now at Graham's Town. He has withdrawn two regiments from the seat of war, and I trust we shall soon be able to withdraw others.

Sir, there is another point in the estimate which I ought to notice, which has been urged by the right honourable gentleman the member for Cambridge University (Mr. Goulburn). He said I had made no allowance for the loss to the revenue from the proposed permission for refining sugar in bond. It is

very inconvenient for me, at this moment, to refer in any detail to the subject of refining in bond. The refining in bond will depend upon certain conditions. I have pledged myself that those conditions shall be shortly placed before those most interested, and I think it improper that they shall be previously bruited about. I can only say, therefore, at present, that I do not make any allowance for a loss on refining in bond, because I believe not the slightest loss to the revenue will occur. I hope the right honourable gentleman will at present be satisfied with my giving my opinion, and not press me to go into any detail upon this point.

Sir, I approach more serious subjects. It has been said that the house-tax has been proposed by the Government in order to enable them to carry the semi-repeal of the malt-tax. Well, I admit that this is a very plausible charge; it is a good party charge. It is very possible that, were I in their situation, I should have made the charge myself. Nevertheless, though it be a plausible charge, a good party charge, it is not a just charge.

These measures have no connection whatever in the policy we have thought it our duty to recommend. Sir, the right honourable gentleman opposite informed the House on Tuesday night that I promised the country a new system of taxation; but he did not produce any authority for that statement, and when statements of such magnitude are made, authorities should be furnished. I will sit down now, if the right honourable gentleman will rise and give me the authority. It is very true that the lively member for Middlesex (Mr. Osborne) quoted a passage from an address to my constituents, which certainly was not merely made to my constituents in Buckinghamshire, but to those in other places whom my feeble authority might influence; but if an opponent could have wished to assist the man whose adversary he was, he could not have done me more justice or given me a better turn than the member for Middlesex has done in quoting the passage in question. I listened to his speech with all that pleasure which I am sure the House shared. I think it was one of his best speeches: but the passage that most gratified me was that which he quoted from my own address, for I had not seen that address for a long time, and really, after

some of these charges which have been lately made, I had arrived at almost a nervous state as to its contents. What did I say there? I, who am charged with misleading the farmers at the election, and throwing them over afterwards—I said that the genius of the age was in favour of free exchange, and that it was in vain to struggle against it; that they must find the means of meeting it by reducing the cost of production, and that one of the means of reducing the cost of production was a revision of taxation. I think more sensible advice, expressed in more moderate language, could not have been given; yet I am described as having deceived the farmers before the election, and thrown them over afterwards.

Sir, the right honourable gentleman says we are assembled here to receive the new system of taxation which I promised. Where is his authority? Her Majesty's Government have fulfilled all that they promised; they did not promise a new system of taxation, but they did promise a revision of the taxation of the country. The Committee will, I hope, excuse my dwelling on this point. We did think it necessary to revise our system of taxation. We gave to the subject a long, an anxious, and an impartial consideration. In reviewing that which I may truly call a colossal subject, the question naturally divided itself into several groups—if I may use a word now familiar to us. We had to consider those articles that enter into the general consumption of the people, that are necessary for their healthy sustenance, and that are exposed to enormous imposts, such as tea and malt. That was one subject on which we felt that it was necessary something should be done to meet the principles of unrestricted competition, now permanently established as the principle of our commercial code. We wished in this respect more nearly to assimilate our financial with our commercial system. We had to consider the whole question of the stamp-duties with reference to those real burdens upon land—upon the transfer of land—which must sooner or later be dealt with; and a question of the utmost difficulty which must also not long be neglected—the question of the legacy and probate duties. We had to consider whether it was possible to propose to Parliament a duty on succession which, in connec-

tion with the total reform of the burdens on the transfer of land, would be an equitable and just settlement of the question, and one which was for the welfare of all classes. That is what I may call the second group. We had, in the third place, to consider those Excise Laws which exercise a pernicious influence upon the employment of capital, and upon the employment of labour, like the soap and paper duties.

The question of the assessed taxes, with the necessary reforms which they require, alone form a fourth group. We were obliged to consider the whole of our tariff with regard to our commercial relations with other countries because there was an inclination in some countries to increase these commercial relations, and we wished to encourage them. These were five great subjects, all of them demanding our attention, with all of which sooner or later a Government must deal; and we had to choose how we would commence this arduous enterprise. But there was a very important question also to consider when we took a general survey of our financial system; a very important question to settle before we could decide even as to the first step we should take; and that was, how far we could prevail upon the country to consent to that amount of direct taxation which was necessary for any ministry that should attempt to enter into a career of financial reform. Sir, I have been accused by the member for Halifax (Sir C. Wood) of making a proposition which recklessly increases the direct taxation of the country. I have been accused by the member for Carlisle (Sir James Graham), prompt in accusation at all times, of pushing direct taxation to a rash extreme. In the first place, the proposition I made on the part of the Government, instead of recklessly increasing the amount of direct taxation, would not, if it passed, occasion so great an amount of direct taxation as prevailed under the superintendence of the finances by the right honourable gentleman the member for Halifax himself, when he enjoyed, not only the income and property tax, but the window-tax, which in the last year of its existence brought him nearly 2,000,000*l.* sterling. The right honourable gentleman, who says that you must not recklessly increase the amount of direct taxation, and charges me with doing so, when in 1850

he commuted the window-tax for a house-tax, first proposed, though fruitlessly, a commutation which would have established a higher house-tax than that which we now recommend coupled by us with great remissions of indirect imposts.

But is this all? Is this all that has been done by the right honourable gentleman who charges me with proposing recklessly to increase the direct taxation of the country? Why, he seems to forget that he is the minister who with the property and income tax you have now producing its full amount, with a window-tax that brought nearly 2,000,000*l.*, came down to the House of Commons one day and proposed to a startled assembly to double nearly that property and income tax. Recklessness! Why, Sir, if recklessness be carelessness of consequences; if it be the conduct of a man who has not well weighed the enterprise in which he is embarked, what are we to esteem this behaviour of the right honourable gentleman? We hear much of the duplication of the house-tax—an immense amount; but if the right honourable gentleman had carried the duplication of the property and income tax, I think he might fairly have been charged with recklessly increasing the direct taxation of the country. The most curious thing, however, is that the minister who came forward to make a proposition which nothing but the most grave conjuncture of circumstances might have justified, at the first menace of opposition withdrew his proposition. Talk of recklessness! Why, what in the history of finance is equal to the recklessness of the right honourable gentleman? And what was the ground on which he withdrew this enormous proposition—a proposition which only the safety of the State would have justified him in making? When he was beaten, baffled, humiliated, he came down to the House of Commons and said that he had sufficient revenue without resorting to that proposition! The future historian will not be believed when he states that a minister came down with a proposition nearly to double the income-tax, and when that proposition was rejected, the next day announced that the ways and means were ample without it. But then the right honourable gentleman tells me—in not very polished, and scarcely in Parliamentary language—that I do not know my



business. He may have learned his business. The House of Commons is the best judge of that; I care not to be his critic. Yet if he have learned his business, he has still to learn that petulance is not sarcasm, and that insolence is not invective.

The Committee will permit me to remind them that in dealing with those five great groups of taxation to which I have called their attention, and all of which I may say equally demanded the consideration of a minister, we had to deal with the great subject of direct taxation. There was, indeed, the income and property tax in existence for a brief space. It was perhaps possible that the ministry might have come forward in the House of Commons and obtained a temporary continuance of that impost. That was not, however, by any means certain. But there were, Sir, peculiar circumstances connected with the position of the ministers with respect to the property and income tax. Her Majesty's Government were of opinion that the time could no longer be delayed when the Government of this country must recognise a difference between the incomes which accrued from precarious and incomes which accrued from realised property. It was evident that such an acknowledgment acted upon must diminish the produce from that tax at a moment when certainly we did not wish our resources from direct taxation to be diminished. It is difficult to answer every observation that has been made in the course of this debate; but another right honourable gentleman who recently spoke has been criticising—I think, before the appropriate time—what he calls my Bill with respect to the property and income tax. In the first place, my Bill is not before the House. When he sees it he may criticise it. Nobody who has had to prepare a property and income tax can be ignorant that there are some anomalies in Schedule D. The anomalies, however, are not confined merely to that schedule. To frame a complete measure on this subject would baffle the happiest genius in finance. There are no doubt alterations which may be made in the arrangement of the schedules; it will be open to any member to propose such. But if they be made they will not affect, at least not materially, the financial result which I placed before the Committee. In laying the resolutions on

the property and income tax on the table, we did not propose to proceed with them before Christmas. We placed them on the table that the principle of the whole of our financial measures should be before members.

The resolutions express the principle we wish to assert. That is all we attempted at this moment. There may be, there unquestionably are, minor modifications of the schedules possible; but between the general statement of our policy and laying the resolutions on the table there was no time to consider these less important points, nor, had there been time, would it have been opportune to do so. We reserved their consideration until the occasion of calling the attention of the House to the general question of the renewal of the tax. We had, then, to consider the great question of direct taxation. It was totally impossible—with whatever group we commenced—that we could embark on a career of financial reform really efficient, unless we had a certain amount of direct taxation, still including the income-tax, to which we could trust. What is the rule we laid down? Instead of being reckless, or, in the language of the right honourable gentleman the member for Carlisle, ready to push direct taxation to a rash extreme, we resolved that the sum of direct taxation on which we should rest should be in amount of revenue inferior to that which had recently prevailed in this country, and which since the repeal of the Corn Laws has been cheerfully assented to by the people. Well, we had then to lay down two principles in dealing with direct taxation. We had to assert as regarded the property and income tax, a difference between incomes of a precarious and incomes of a fixed character. We had next to vindicate a principle which we believed and do believe is a just one, and which if not now, must ultimately be recognised and adopted—namely, that the basis of direct taxation should be enlarged. Having these two principles to guide us in devising means by which we were to obtain the amount of direct taxation necessary for our purpose, we believe that we have applied them moderately, temperately, scientifically and wisely, in the measures before the House. We believe that the difference which we recognise between realised and precarious incomes is one

which certainly does not err on the side of excess; but that the recognition of that difference is also one which will justly gratify the working millions of this country, and that in asking them to contribute to the revenue of the country by extending and increasing the house-tax, we are taking a course which in its operation and ultimate results will be greatly for their interests.

The question of the suffrage has been introduced into this debate. The policy of mixing up the franchise with taxation is, in my opinion, very questionable; but I say to those gentlemen on the other side of the House who have sought to introduce this question of the suffrage, that, if it is to be a permanent feature of our social system that there shall be a particular class invested with political power, which shall exercise that power to throw an undue weight of direct taxation upon the wealthier portion of the community, and an undue weight of indirect taxation on the working classes, I cannot imagine a circumstance more fatal to this country, or one more pregnant of disastrous consequences. But of this I feel convinced, that those who will first experience the disastrous consequences will be the privileged class itself. There was one other observation by the member for Carlisle which I feel I ought to notice. That right honourable gentleman—whom I will not say I greatly respect,<sup>1</sup> but rather whom I greatly regard—particularly dilated on the hard case of that class whose incomes amount to between 100*l.* and 150*l.* a year; those whom he considered to form the most straitened class perhaps in the country, and who bore most of the brunt of indirect taxation. That argument, or that assertion rather, has been followed up this evening by the honourable and learned gentleman the member for Southampton (Sir A. Cockburn). Now, that subject has been investigated by men who have devoted their lives to the study of these questions, and whose opinions are superior to all party contentions. It has recently been investigated by a gentleman who is what is called a Liberal, and who if he were a member of this House, would sit opposite to me—I mean Mr. Greg, one of the most

<sup>1</sup> These words were very severely handled by Mr. Gladstone in the speech which followed; but Mr. Disraeli's meaning evidently was that he should not respect Sir J. Graham as a high authority in finance.

able inquirers into these subjects of the present day; and it is his opinion—and I believe that if any position has been more completely established than another as regards the incidence of taxation, it is this—that there is no class upon whom that incidence falls more lightly than upon those who possess incomes from 100*l.* to 150*l.* a year. It is that class who possess property of 300*l.* or 400*l.* a year who bear the brunt of indirect taxation. That can be shown in the most complete and satisfactory manner. But we had on Tuesday night a doleful and piteous appeal made to the House upon the hardship of taxing ‘poor clerks’ with incomes of between 100*l.* and 150*l.* a year. The right honourable gentleman stated that 150*l.* a year was exactly that point in the scale where manual labour ends and professional skill begins. You can recall the effective manner in which the right honourable gentleman stated this. He showed himself an unrivalled artist when he told us that this was the point where the fustian jacket ceased and broadcloth began.

Few can comprehend the labour of research and thought necessary to determine the just incidence of taxation. I am sure that there has been nothing ever written on the subject of which I have not attempted to avail myself. My researches have not been meagre. I hope I am superior to quoting Hansard ‘and all that’—but I may state that among the documents, public and official—the records of the great ministers who have preceded my humble effort—which I read to guide me, I found one which greatly influenced me. I found the Superannuation Bill of 1834, which was drawn up and introduced by the right honourable gentleman the member for Carlisle, being one of those laudable efforts which the right honourable gentleman has made to improve the administration of the country. Well, this was its principle: I found in that Bill that the line was drawn at 100*l.* per annum; that the ‘poor clerk’ under that sum only pays 2½ per cent., while the ‘poor clerk’ above that sum, though he may only have 110*l.* a year, pays 5 per cent. That was one of the reckless legislative labours of the right honourable gentleman the member for Carlisle. I know my deficiencies as well as any man in this House—probably better. But after all, what, I ask, is to guide

us? I am perfectly willing not to lay too much stress on the *epa pteroenta*—uttered in the heat of debate, but when I refer to public records, and when I look at a statute of the realm, then I have a right to suppose that I encounter the calm, solid and solemn conclusions of a statesman. Though I would not quote a passage of a speech as absolute authority for legislation, yet if I find a principle embalmed in a statute, I feel that, although time may have elapsed, and though opinions may have changed upon other matters, this is the better mind of the man, and being the better mind of a most able man, I confess the reading of that statute did influence me in that arrangement I have proposed, with regard to the income-tax, respecting the ‘poor clerks’ which the right honourable gentleman has so severely criticised. And remember what has happened to the ‘poor clerks’ since 1834 when this statute was drawn; remember all the reductions of taxation which have been effected since that time, and of which the poor clerk has had the benefit. Remember the repeal of the Corn Laws. Look at the position of the ‘poor clerk’ with 110*l.* a year, and who had a double superannuation-tax placed upon him by the right honourable gentleman; and look at his position now. I say, without hesitation, that I do not believe that the condition of any class has since that time been so much improved as that of the clerks whose salaries range between 100*l.* and 150*l.* a year.

Well, having decided that it was necessary, before we undertook the great labour which we felt it our duty to embark in, that we should have a certain amount of direct taxation to rest upon; having determined that we should make this difference in the assessment in the schedules between realised and precarious incomes, which must inevitably reduce the amount of direct taxation from that source which our predecessors enjoyed; having believed that we had attempted to supply the necessary amount by our proposition with respect to the house-tax in a manner which was reasonable; which was just; which was on the whole most beneficial to the community; which in its operation would ultimately tend to confer advantages on those on whom the tax was to be imposed; having by this

measure, if successful, succeeded in obtaining the amount of direct taxation which was necessary, but which was still inferior in amount to that which only a few years ago had been enjoyed by our predecessors, we had to decide upon which of the five groups of taxation we should operate. Recognising—I am obliged to repeat it—recognising the great and permanent revolution which has occurred in the commercial system of this country; recognising, as we have done, unrestricted competition as the principle on which our commercial policy is henceforth to be based; and wishing to assimilate our financial to our commercial system, and assuming that we had obtained this amount of direct taxation to rest upon, we ultimately decided that it would be the wisest course to commence by acting upon those articles which entered most into the consumption of the people, and that it would be for their salutary advantage if we selected those articles which were subjected to the largest impost. Now, that is the real history of the connection between the imposition of direct, and the remission of indirect taxes, as they appear in the propositions before us. Under these circumstances we were induced to recommend to the House the proposition which we have made with respect to the tea and malt duties.

Sir, at this late hour I will endeavour to be as succinct as possible, and will not, therefore, go into the question of the reduction of the tea-duties. I think the House and the country have recognised the wisdom of the course we have recommended. Neither at this late hour will I enter into any elaborate argument on the subject of the effect which will be produced by the modification of the malt-tax. I am told that if you reduce the tax on the consumer, and only as a tax on the consumer—and to that point I shall advert presently, as being in perfect harmony with the principles laid down in our revision of the taxation—on one article, to the extent of 2,500,000*l.* sterling, that we shall not in any way affect price, and that all the reductions will go to the brewer. Sir, I remember when we used to discuss the effect of taxation on another article, that similar observations were made. I do not care now to remember from what quarter they emanated, but the effect and object of these observations were exactly the same. Then it was, ‘Oh, those

villains, the bakers !' just as now it is to be, ' Oh, those villains, the brewers !' You might reduce the price of corn ; you might injure the agricultural interest ; you might ruin the farmers and the country gentlemen, but you could not reduce the price of the loaf to the consumer. No ; the bakers took it all. Yes, and there were the millers too. The millers were the worst of all ; they carried off all the reduction. Well, those arguments had a considerable effect, and there was such a prejudice raised against the bakers throughout the country that I should not have been surprised if they had been all hanged in one day, as the bakers had once been in Constantinople. At that time it used to be shown that a fall of 10s. a quarter on wheat would not affect the price of bread, and we were told that the bakers then, like the brewers now, were a great monopoly—if not great capitalists—they were a kind of Freemasons, and, do what you would, it would be totally impossible in any way ever to get a cheap loaf. And now—such are the vicissitudes of public life—now we hear the same argument from those gentlemen who used to dilate so eloquently on the necessity of buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest market. The great friends of the consumer ; the enemies of colossal monopolies ; here we find them all arrayed in favour of high taxation for the producer, and here we find them, with taunts to us, teaching all the fallacies which we at least have had the courage to give up. Tell me protection is dead ! Tell me there is no protectionist party in the country ! Why, 'tis rampant, and 'tis there ! They have taken up our principles with our benches, and I believe they will be quite as unsuccessful.

I must here make one observation. I say it is in the interest of the consumer, in complete accordance with the principles we laid down in revising the taxation of the country, that we have proposed this measure ; but I do not say it will not be for the interest of the cultivator of the soil, any more than I think that by remitting the duty on tea we have not done that which will greatly promote the welfare of our Indian commerce and our China trade. But we do not bring forward these propositions in that sense, for the advantage of the mercantile interest of India, or for the benefit of our trade with China. Let the

farmers—or even those odious beings the owners of the soil—have the benefits of this legislation just the same as you admit the manufacturer of Manchester or the merchant of Liverpool to find in his transactions the advantage of reducing the price of bread or the price of tea. What we say is this: Deal with the interest of the consumer, and incidentally you will find that you are producing the greatest advantage to the great productive interests of the country. But, Sir, I am told that in repealing a portion of the malt-tax—notwithstanding that I showed you in my statement how modestly I have put the resources of the country—I have shaken to its foundation the credit of England. The credit of England depends on a farthing a pot on the poor man's beer! Never shall I forget how that 'weird Sibyl,' the member for Cambridge University, gave forth that solemn oracle—'The public credit of England is in danger.'

I doubt whether such mere personal imputations and wide assertions are quite justifiable. He says the public credit is in danger. Well, I don't think it is. I think public credit never was in a better position; I never remember any period in the history of this country when her resources were, I may say, daily so visibly increasing. I will not now, Sir, enter into any discussion as to the cause of that prosperity—whether it be due to the influx of gold, the repeal of the Corn Laws, to emigration, or to anything else: though Sir, as to emigration, there was one point in the speech of the honourable member for Kidderminster to which I ought to make, perhaps, some reference. I hold the opinion of the honourable member for Kidderminster to be quite as heretical on emigration as it is upon brewing and upon malt. I repeat that I am very glad to find him here among us; but all the opinions I have heard from him yet appear to be anything but sound. I continue in that opinion. In the first place the honourable gentleman confounded Ireland and England; though I, at considerable pains, and perhaps not necessarily, showed the distinction between them the other night. As to England, it will be interesting to honourable members to be made acquainted with a passage from a letter written by an eminent actuary and perhaps our ablest statis-



tical inquirer. His name is well known to the honourable member for Montrose, for he gave important evidence before the Committee on the Income Tax. 'The rate,' he says, 'of births and marriages has greatly increased in this country, and I think emigration may facilitate the rate rather than impede it. The reserve of producing power which we have in this country'—that is a point I wish to bring to the attention of the honourable member for Kidderminster. He has lived abroad in a country with a sparse population, and he has no idea of the reserve of producing power we have here. But he goes on: 'The reserve of producing power which we have in this country you may infer from the fact that in the south-eastern counties to 100 married women of ages between 20 and 45 there are 70 women of the same age—that is from 20 to 45—unmarried, of whom only about 7 bear children, notwithstanding.'

Now, I have confidence in the reserve of producing power, which I think the honourable member, with his colonial experience, had not given sufficient credit to us for. Now, Sir, our opinion is, that under the arrangements which we have recommended, the surplus revenue of the country will be very considerable at the end of the year 1854-55. But, Sir, I look to other resources for that year than to increasing profits or to the increased population of this country, and I will mention what they are. I look to a great retrenchment in the public expenditure of this country; and I will, if the Committee allow me, advert for one moment to this topic. I believe that any great retrenchment can only be secured by consulting the efficiency of our establishments, and trusting to the economy which is the natural consequence of that efficiency. I do not think it possible that the result can be reaped till 1854-55. I hope the House will permit me very shortly to show to them, by a remarkable illustration, what is the result of administrative reforms conducted on the principle of efficiency without any regard to what is called mere economy. I, in my estimate of the effects of administrative reform, should have spoken of millions; but I am now going to deal with an instance in which only thousands of pounds are concerned; but the case I am about to lay before you is a real case which, however slight in

instance, will serve to show the principle. It is due to my noble friend the member for Buckingham (the Marquis of Chandos) to say that I am entirely indebted to him for the case in question; and I may most sincerely say of him that since he has been in the service of Her Majesty, there never was a public man who devoted his life so completely to the public service. In preparing the measures of administrative reform which I wish to bring before the House, and in making a catalogue of the establishments to be attended to, I found in the Report of the Select Committee of 1848 upon Miscellaneous Expenditure, of which I believe an honourable member opposite was the chairman, this memorandum—‘Whether a reform might not be effected by uniting the Chief Secretary’s Office in Ireland with the Privy Council Office.’ That suggestion was made in 1848. I called the attention of my noble friend the member for Buckingham to this passage, and I said, ‘Will you go to Ireland, and will you take somebody with you to aid you in your labours, and examine into this question of the Chief Secretary’s Office? But, mind you, mere retrenchment is not our object; our object is efficiency. If more money is necessary to make the department efficient, you shall have it; but go to Ireland, examine into the whole question, and report to me by what means you can render the office more efficient.’

Well, Sir, he went to Ireland, accompanied by the Secretary of the Audit Board, one of the most intelligent and assiduous of our public officers. They made their inquiries into the Chief Secretary’s Office at Dublin. Remember that by the Report of the committee of 1848 it was suggested whether the consolidation of the Chief Secretary’s Office and the Privy Council Office would not be practicable. My noble friend, however, effected a consolidation, not only of the Chief Secretary’s Office and the Privy Council Office, but of the Fines and Penalties Office. He had to deal with departments maintained at an annual cost of 21,738*l*. He put the whole office into the most efficient state that a public office can be in, and the consequence of its being put into a most efficient state is, that the cost of 21,738*l*. has been reduced by the sum of 5,178*l*. Thus the saving effected by an inquiry conducted without any other

consideration but that of efficiency, produced a saving of 25 per cent. upon the original cost; and yet I am told that nothing can be done in administrative reforms. I must in justice to my noble friend notice another instance.

My noble friend is of a too retiring nature: there are very few men more capable of imparting information to the House, especially upon matters of finance; but he takes refuge instead in that indomitable power of application for which he is distinguished. There was an application made, and apparently a very fair one, by the office of the Secretary at War, when the Militia Bill was passed, for an increase of staff. There was of course a very considerable increase of duty in the office consequent upon the new measure, and it was just one of those demands which might have been conceded heedlessly, and which anyone, upon a superficial view of the case, might have readily accorded. But I, having great confidence in the principle of administrative reform and equal confidence in the abilities of my noble friend, before we agreed to any increase of expenditure, requested him to appoint a committee of inquiry, which he did with the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of the Audit Board, and a gentleman not now a member of this house, for whom I have a great respect, the present Deputy Secretary of War (Mr. B. Hawes). The committee examined the subject, and put the office into a most efficient state, and the whole of the additional business is carried on without one farthing of additional expense. In the case of the Irish office, the persons employed were reduced from 57 to 40. But allow me to remind the House that retrenchment was not the object, although economy was the result. Efficiency was the object, and it was effected at a saving of expense. These are, some may think, minute instances, but they are instances well worthy of attention. The Government have been dealing, however, with much larger instances. They have been attempting to deal with the great departments of public expenditure; and, as the results of that attempt, I, as the organ of the Government, express our opinion that there may be a very considerable retrenchment made in the public expenditure, and that this retrenchment may be

brought to bear in the year 1854-55. But, Sir, one thing is quite clear—that you cannot embark in an undertaking of this kind unless you have the fair support of the House of Commons.

Now, my own opinion is this—that it is not wise to grapple with these great departments of public expenditure by committees of the House of Commons. I am of opinion that you must deal with them by commissions—the same commissions that have been brought to bear upon the revenue departments; but, although we may have commissions and the royal sanction, it is necessary that the questions should be fairly brought before the House of Commons in the way of exposition, so that you should also have the moral sanction and support of the House. It is perhaps the most difficult undertaking which a minister can embark in; and unless he has, I may say, both the Crown and Parliament to back him, failure is certain, though with that support I think success is equally sure. Well then, when I am told that I have no good ground for my surplus of 1854-55, my answer is that I believe we shall have much more than the surplus which I cursorily ventured upon in my general statement. I tell you that we have other resources upon which we depend, and that I believe it will be the fault of the House of Commons if in the year 1854-55 they do not find their public service more efficient than it is, and less costly. I think I have now noticed every objection of importance which has been brought against the Government propositions. I have avoided entering into the question as to the unconstitutionality of our conduct with respect to the income-tax. Legitimate opportunities will hereafter arise for commenting upon all that may be said upon this head, and the House will, I doubt not, come to a fair decision upon it.

Although many minute objections have been made to points of detail, I have not stopped to notice these; I have not stopped to vindicate that part of the income-tax relating to the farmers' schedule. I shall be prepared to lay before the Committee the facts and reasons which have induced us to take that course; but I may state now that our only object was to make as close an approximation to justice as possible, and I will not vote

for that schedule if it is not the prevailing feeling of the House that it is a just arrangement. I will not enter now into the question of the hop-duty and things of that kind. After so protracted a debate, and following so many speakers who commented upon so many points in the financial scheme of the Government, I hope the Committee will feel that if I have avoided some of those points, it has been from deference to the time of the House, and not from any wish of my own to avoid the discussion. But some advice has been offered to me which I ought perhaps to notice. I have been told to withdraw my Budget. I was told that Mr. Pitt withdrew his Budget, and I know that more recently other persons have done so too. Sir, I do not aspire to the fame of Mr. Pitt, but I will not submit to the degradation of others. No, Sir; I have seen the consequences of a Government not being able to pass their measures—consequences not honourable to the Government, not advantageous to the country, and not in my opinion, conducive to the reputation of this House, which is most dear to me.

I remember a Budget which was withdrawn, and re-withdrawn, and withdrawn again in the year 1848. What was the consequence of that Government thus existing upon sufferance? What was the consequence to the finances of the country? Why, that injurious, unjust and ignoble transaction respecting the commutation of the window-tax and house-duty, which now I am obliged to attempt to remedy. The grievance is deeper than mere questions of party consideration. When parties are balanced—when a Government cannot pass its measures—the highest principles of public life, the most important of the dogmas of politics, degenerate into party questions. Look at this question of direct taxation—the most important question of the day. It is a question which must sooner or later force itself upon everybody's attention; and I see before me many who I know sympathise, so far as that important principle is concerned, with the policy of the Government. Well direct taxation, although applied with wisdom, temperance and prudence, has become a party question. Talk of administrative reform! Talk of issuing commissions to inquire into our dockyards! Why, if I were, which is not impossible, by inter-

labour to bring forward a scheme which might save a million annually to the country, administrative reform would become a party question to-morrow. Yes! I know what I have to face. I have to face a coalition. The combination may be successful. But coalitions, although successful, have always found this, that their triumph has been short. This too I know, that England does not love coalitions. I appeal from the coalition to that public opinion which governs this country—to that public opinion whose mild and irresistible influence can control even the decrees of Parliaments, and without whose support the most august and ancient institutions are but ‘the baseless fabric of a vision.’

SPEECH ON MR. GLADSTONE'S BUDGET, May 2, 1853.<sup>1</sup>

[In his Budget of 1853, Mr. Gladstone had followed Mr. Disraeli's example by extending the income-tax to incomes of 100*l.* a year, and by also extending it to Ireland. But he accompanied these proposals by a scheme for the total extinction of the tax within seven years. Sir Bulwer Lytton moved an amendment to the effect that the extension of the income-tax to classes hitherto exempt from it, and its prolongation for seven years, was unjust and impolitic. On the fourth and last night of the debate, Mr. Disraeli spoke at great length in support of the amendment, which was negatived by a majority of 71. He however, specially devoted himself to the injustice of Mr. Gladstone's change in the legacy-duties, which were now to be extended to all successions whatever.]

WHAT is the condition of the proprietor of the soil who has been told to devote his capital to the improvement of his estate? You are going to propose a tax which you call extending the legacy-duties to land, which will act as a direct tax of a very considerable amount upon all real property, and, of course, if upon all real property, in a very great degree, if not mainly, upon the land. Now, there seems, as far as I could collect the opinion of the Committee as the debate has proceeded, some little misapprehension on this subject. An honourable friend of mine, the member for Wakefield (Mr. Sandars), who has given in his adhesion to the project of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, said that he did so because the right honourable gentleman was going to fulfil that which Mr. Pitt failed in doing; and another honourable gentleman opposite eulogised the right honourable gentleman on the same score, and said that Mr. Pitt had only failed by one vote in accomplishing that

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from *Hansard's Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

which the right honourable gentleman now proposed, and which he hoped he would succeed in accomplishing. Now, there is a very great error in this. Mr. Pitt never proposed anything of the kind. Mr. Pitt never proposed any tax upon settled property of any kind. I have read the Act which Mr. Pitt brought in, and if the honourable gentleman who laughs means to express any incredulity on the subject I must refer him to that Act. Mr. Pitt introduced two Bills, one of which is the origin of our present legacy-duties with reference to personalty, and the other was a Bill which would have extended the same system of legacy-duty to landed property which was not settled. It has been alleged that it was the selfishness of the landlords then in Parliament which threw out that Bill. It was nothing of the kind. Nine-tenths of the landlords in Parliament were possessors, as gentlemen in this House are at present possessors, of settled estates, and the proposition of Mr. Pitt never touched them. It was thrown out on different grounds, and it was mainly thrown out by the influence of Mr. Fox. It was Mr. Fox whose influence threw out that Bill; and it was he who opposed it on grounds to which I will hereafter advert—grounds which were considered sound and scientific, without doubt. The Bill, therefore, was not thrown out by the selfishness of the landlords, and the only persons whose interests were affected by it—and for whom the battle was fought—were the small proprietors of England, who were not members of Parliaments, and whose estates were not settled. Now, this is a subject of very grave importance.

The right honourable gentleman the President of the Board of Control said, the other night, that the late Government were going to propose a tax on successions. Now, I am sure either the memory of the right honourable gentleman must have been imperfect, or he must have spoken from inadvertence when he said this. It was the duty of the late Government, when they revised the taxation of the country, not to omit so important a subject as the duty on successions, or the legacy-duty, and certainly it was our opinion that it was most imprudent to delay dealing with that question, and that it was a subject which, for a permanent settlement, ought, without unnecessary loss of



time, to be brought before the House. What I did say on the occasion referred to is within the recollection of right honourable friends near me—and certainly I could have intended to say nothing more. It was, that we did not think it impossible to make a proposal upon that subject which would terminate for ever the controversy in a manner which would be recognised as perfectly satisfactory by all parties. And that was not a vague phrase; that proposition was a matured proposition; and probably in the course of this discussion—though I will not trouble the Committee with it now—I may be able on some future occasion to submit it to the consideration of the House. But, Sir, in considering the question of a tax upon successions, there are many points to be considered before we come to a vote upon it. We must ask ourselves in the first place, is it a just tax? Is it abstractedly a just tax? Is it a politic, a just tax, a tax that can be vindicated on principle? We must ask ourselves in the second place, whether, if it be a tax sound in principle, it is a tax adapted to the country in which it is proposed to be introduced. Thirdly, we must ask ourselves what are the data which the Chancellor of the Exchequer has before him upon which he founds his estimate of its produce, and, above all, what is the machinery by which he means this tax to be raised? These are three important points which would well deserve consideration. For my own part, Sir, although I think that if the Bill of Mr. Pitt had passed it would have been unwise (unless the state of our finances justified us in doing so) to disturb that arrangement; for my own part, I believe that all taxes on successions, whatever shape they may take, are unsound in principle. They are taxes on capital. They are unsound in principle as regards personal property, but they are much more unsound in principle as regards landed property, because they lead to partition, which in my opinion is a very great evil, and much to be deprecated.

But I am not going to enter into that important subject now. All that I can say is that you cannot deny that, by proposing this tax on successions with reference to landed property, you are proposing a new tax upon the land. I have shown you that in dealing with your indirect taxation you have

commenced a system and you have laid down a principle which must immensely aggravate the national taxation upon the British producer. I have shown you, in the second place, that while you are about to pursue that unjust and injurious policy—a policy the propriety of which no man can vindicate—while you are aggravating the pressure of indirect taxation upon the British producer, you are inflicting upon the cultivator of the soil a direct tax in the shape of an income-tax, and upon the possessor of the soil a direct tax in the shape of a tax upon successions. Now, Sir, I say that the whole scope of the Budget of the right honourable gentleman is conceived in a spirit of injustice to the land. I will not touch upon the past. I will not ask you, was it politic, was it wise, or was it generous to attack the land, both indirectly and directly, after such an immense revolution had taken place in those laws which regulated the importation of foreign produce. I will make no appeal *ad misericordiam*. What you have done, you have done; we have given our assent to it. I will not refer to the past, and upon that ground I refrain from appealing to you. But I will remind you that the minister who has conceived this Budget—who has conceived it, as I maintain I have proved, in a spirit of injustice to the land—who is aggravating the burden of indirect taxation to the land, and is proposing new direct taxes on the cultivator and the proprietor of the soil, is the very minister—the first minister—who has come forward and in his place in Parliament talked of the vast load of local taxation to which real property is exposed. The vast load of local taxation which real property endures! Well then, this is an age of compensation: what is to be our compensation for that?

I remember when I made an appeal to the sense of justice of the House of Commons on that head I was met by two kinds of opponents. One school denied point blank that there were any burdens upon real property which were peculiar to it, or which it was not bound to bear. But there was another class of opponents, who took a different ground. They said: 'It is very true that there is an undue burden of taxation upon real property, and upon land as the most important portion of real property, but you forget you have not to pay the legacy-duty.'

Why, Sir, I have shown over and over again that exemption from the legacy-duty was no compensation for the weight, the great weight, of local taxation which your minister has admitted. But let me remind you now, that we are not only to have this great weight of local taxation acknowledged by the Government, but it is not to be remedied by the Government; nay, more, it is not only not to be remedied by the Government, but it is to be accompanied by the very tax an exemption from which they used to say was one compensation for those burdens. Sir, we have lived to see strange things. I remember when Sir Robert Peel proposed his first income-tax, and I remember the noble lord, the leader of the House, sitting on these (Opposition) benches rising and, with the traditionary spirit of Mr. Fox, denouncing the impost, as Mr. Fox denounced the legacy-duties, because the noble lord, as well as Mr. Fox, had some feeling for the land of his forefathers, and for the burdens which it had so long borne. I remember how the noble lord admonished Sir Robert Peel. The noble lord could not deny there was a deficiency in the Exchequer, for he had just left office, and knew pretty well the state of his treasury. The noble lord said there were other means of supplying the deficiency—anything but this odious, this unjust, this inequitable, this inquisitorial income-tax. The epithets are the noble lord's, and not my own. Do anything but this, the noble lord said; if you have a deficiency, why don't you supply it by applying the legacy-duty to the land? Well, Sir, he has applied the legacy-duty to the land, but he has given us the income-tax too. That is the fate of England.

And now, what is the fate of Ireland? Sir Robert Peel did not propose an income-tax for Ireland, though he proposed one for England. Sir Robert Peel thought that there were constitutional and local grounds which should forbid him, even if he wished it, to apply the income-tax to Ireland; but he said, 'I must have some substitute, and that substitute shall be a duty upon spirits.' The Irish shall have a duty on spirits instead of the income-tax, just as the English were to have, if the policy of the noble lord had prevailed, a legacy-duty instead of an income-tax; but now England has got the legacy-duty as well as

the income-tax, and Ireland is to have the spirit duty and the income-tax too. Strange fate that both countries from the ministry of 'All the Talents' should receive such accumulated blessings!

But when these great scandals take place, and when the owners of the soil and the cultivators of the soil complain that in the projects of the Finance Minister they are not justly treated, and claim from him nothing but justice—when, not only injured by his project, but irritated by those unwise concessions, they come to him by their representatives, how are they met? By taunts and by jeers. What said the right honourable President of the Board of Control the other night to some one who had made comments on the scheme of the Government? He said: 'You had better take my advice: you had better take this measure, or you will get worse.' Now, said the President of the Board of Control, 'remember the eight shilling fixed duty. You did not take that; you see what not taking the measure we brought forward led to.' Well, that is a very favourite topic on the other side. (Sir C. Wood: Hear, hear!) The cheer of the right honourable gentleman will allow me to dwell on it a little longer. It is not merely the President of the Board of Control that takes that course. The President of the Board of Control is rather of an active and vigorous than of an original mind. The President of the Board of Control has followed the example of more eminent persons. The noble lord (Lord John Russell) is very fond of giving us his advice on this subject. At the beginning of the year I brought forward a motion respecting our relations with France, and it fell to the noble lord to answer the observations I made. The noble lord, on that occasion—the subject being our relations with France—delivered himself of an oration in favour of free trade: not a very uncommon habit with the noble lord. And he said that if I had followed his advice I might have been one of Her Majesty's ministers at that time. So far as that was concerned, I believe it did not depend upon my following his advice; all that was necessary for me to have done would have been to follow his example. I dare say if we had sub-

mitted to what I have seen ministers submit to, that probably we might have been sitting on those (the ministerial) benches at this very time. But that, however, is not the point to which I wish to call the attention of the noble lord.

The noble lord has said—and he has now been followed by the President of the Board of Control—‘You never take our advice. I advised you to take an eight shillings duty on corn, but you would not take it.’ Now, the noble lord has reminded us of that several times. I should not, however, have now noticed it if the President of the Board of Control had not revived it. If the taunt had come from the right honourable baronet the member for Portsmouth (Sir F. Baring), who was Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time, I might have allowed it to pass, because he might have been justified in making it; but the taunt has been so often repeated and stereotyped that I think it is time it should cease. I have, therefore, thus noticed it, in order, if possible, to prevent its repetition. I think it would only have been decent of the noble lord to have remembered under whose advice, and at whose urgent instance, we did refuse an eight shillings duty on corn. Far be it from me to deprecate the colossal powers of the mind which could conceive so vast an idea as an eight shillings duty on corn. I give the noble lord all the credit that is due to him in that respect. But at the same time when the noble lord recollects who was the statesman under whose advice and at whose instance that proposal was refused, and when he remembers who those are by whom he is now surrounded—when the noble lord remembers he has thrown aside the Whig party, and that he has accepted a subordinate office under a subordinate officer of Sir Robert Peel, I think he might have felt that the time has come when scoffs and sneers should cease.

I have already said that there is no longer any difference of material interests between the people of the great towns and the people of the country. But I am told that there are social and political differences. I am very loth to believe it. I cannot but believe that it will be remembered that these great towns are situate in a country of no considerable extent, with

no excessive population, with a commerce which, however great, has been equalled, and with manufactures which, however successful, have been surpassed. What, then, makes this country great? The national character of the country, created by its institutions and by the traditionary influences impressed upon those institutions. Those institutions are deeply and broadly planted in the soil, and that soil is not the possession of any exclusive class. The merchant or the manufacturer may deposit within it his accumulated capital, and he may enjoy those privileges to which its possession entitles him, on condition that he discharges those duties which its possession also imposes. Then, why this hostility to the land? Every man is deeply interested in maintaining its influence. I therefore adjure those gentlemen who are the representatives of large towns to condescend to ponder over these observations, and not to be led away by prejudices; remembering that we are all alike interested in maintaining the greatness of our country, and that that greatness depends upon its institutions as well as its material prosperity. Should, however—as I trust not—the representatives of towns take another course, then of this I feel convinced, that if they are still alienated from us—if they still proceed in their illusory progress, they may perhaps arrive at the goal which they contemplate, they may perhaps achieve the object they have set before them, but I believe they will be greatly disappointed in the result, and they will find they have only changed a first-rate kingdom for a second-rate republic.

WAYS AND MEANS. BUDGET, April 19, 1858.<sup>1</sup>

[On April 19, 1858, Mr. Disraeli, now a second time Chancellor of the Exchequer, brought forward his third Budget. Circumstances had greatly changed since the introduction of the Budget of 1857. The China war and the Indian Mutiny had intervened, as the Russian war had done four years before, to upset our financial expectations. The Army and Navy estimates had greatly increased: and Mr. Disraeli found that he had to provide for an expenditure of more than 67,000,000*l.* while the revenue on which he could reckon, allowing the income tax to sink to 5*d.* agreeably to the existing understanding, was 63,120,000*l.* Of the expenditure required, however, 3,500,000*l.* was for the repayment of debt incurred by temporary borrowing; and the question arose whether the payment of the debt should be postponed or the income-tax again raised. Mr. Disraeli determined on the former alternative: and 'in the discussion on the Budget which followed a very general approval of its principal features was expressed by nearly all the prominent members of the House' (*Twenty Years of Financial Policy*, by Sir Stafford Northcote). 'It may be observed in passing,' adds the same authority, 'that, although Mr. Disraeli's estimates were much cavilled at, and regarded as excessively sanguine, they were fully justified by the result. He reckoned upon receiving from the four sources of income just mentioned (*i.e.* customs, excise, the stamp-duties and the Post Office) 53,050,000*l.*: he actually received from them 53,225,712*l.*']

THE Chancellor of the Exchequer: Sir, since the right honourable gentleman the member for Radnor (Sir George Lewis) explained in Committee the ways and means he intended to provide for the service of the year just terminated, a very great change has taken place in the condition of the country, and I am sorry to say in the wellbeing of the people. At the commencement of the year 1857, and, indeed, during

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

all the preceding year, our exports had continually and considerably increased; the returns of our imports were favourable—I might say, highly favourable—and, although a high rate of discount prevailed generally throughout that period, it did not appear to offer any obstacle to the commercial enterprise of the country. But towards the end of the year 1857, this prospect of continued prosperity was clouded and disturbed. The American panic acted very distressingly upon the commercial condition of our own country, and at that time there arose a monetary crisis, which, whether we look at the number of the houses which failed, or the amount for which they failed, has not in severity been exceeded even in *our* mercantile history. The *minimum* rate of discount in the month of November was 10 per cent. That rate prevailed almost throughout December. At the very close of the year the rate was 8 per cent.; at the end of January 4 per cent. When I acceded to office the rate was that which now prevails—3 per cent. The effect of this commercial disturbance and distress was very great upon the revenue. It is a very significant circumstance, that at the end of the first three quarters of the financial year—namely, December 31 last—the judicious and temperate estimate of my right honourable predecessor was not even equalled; but, strange to say, during the last quarter of the financial year—from December 31 to the end of March—in the great items of customs, excise, and stamps, it was not only fulfilled, but exceeded by (speaking in round numbers) 1,500,000*l.*

I am extremely unwilling, on occasions of this kind, to trouble the Committee unnecessarily with statistical details; but I have here a slight memorandum of the effect of the monetary crisis upon the income of the country, which they will perhaps permit me to read. The quarter ending December 31, 1857, compared with the similar quarter of the preceding year, shows a total decrease in customs, excise, and stamps of 766,000*l.*; but the quarter ending March 31, 1858, shows a very different result, compared with the corresponding quarter of the preceding year—namely, an increase of 1,400,000*l.* in those items. As I am upon this topic of the condition of our trade and of the effects of the monetary crisis generally upon



our commerce, the Committee will, perhaps, think this the best opportunity for me to lay before them the effect of that state of things upon our export trade. The exports in almost all articles fell off, in the last quarter of 1857, the quarter of extreme trial, to the following extent. In the nine months ending September 30, 1857, the increase in the declared value of our exports, compared with the corresponding period of the preceding year, was  $12\frac{1}{2}$  per cent.; in the ten months ending October 31, that increase was only  $11\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. In the eleven months ending November 30, when the crisis was at its height, our exports had increased only 8 per cent.; and in the twelve months ending December 31, this increase, compared with the preceding year, had sunk to  $5\frac{1}{2}$  per cent.—that is to say, that was the amount of the increase as compared with the same period of the preceding year.

Sir, although, as I have already observed, upon these occasions it is not advisable to load financial statements with too much statistical detail, the Committee will, I think, expect and deem it convenient that I should place before them the general result of our exports and imports on trade and navigation. I will, in doing so, avail myself of a brief but important statement which has been drawn up, and which will clearly show the result. It is, I believe, the only document of the kind with which I shall have occasion to trouble the Committee. It is a statement of the exports and imports of the United Kingdom, and of the tonnage of British and foreign vessels in different years. I will take the year 1853—the year before the war—and the years 1855, 1856, and 1857. The total declared value of the exports and manufactures of the United Kingdom in the year 1853 was, in round numbers, 99,000,000*l.* In 1855 the declared value had sunk to 95,500,000*l.*; in 1856 it had risen to 116,000,000*l.*; and in 1857 it had still further risen to 122,000,000*l.* In 1853 the exports of textile fabrics amounted to 52,000,000*l.*; in 1855 to 51,000,000*l.*; in 1856 to 59,000,000*l.*; and in 1857 to 61,000,000*l.* The exportation of metal fabrics in 1853, the year before the war, amounted in value to 19,500,000*l.*; in 1855 it sank to about 18,000,000*l.*; in 1856 it rose to 23,500,000*l.*; and in 1857 it reached

26,000,000*l.* The real value of the total imports into the United Kingdom in 1855 was 143,000,000*l.*; in 1856 172,000,000*l.*; and in 1857 187,000,000*l.* The imports of raw cotton for consumption amounted in the year before the war, 1853, to 746,000,000 lbs.; in 1855 to 767,000,000 lbs.; in 1856 to 877,000,000 lbs.; and in 1857 to 837,000,000 lbs. In 1853 British tonnage amounted to 9,000,000 tons; and foreign to 6,000,000 tons. In 1855 British tonnage was still 9,000,000 tons, and foreign remained about 6,000,000. In 1856 British tonnage reached 11,000,000 tons, and foreign about 7,000,000. In 1857 British tonnage had risen to 11,600,000 tons, and foreign to 7,400,000. The total amount of tonnage before the war was 15,380,000 tons, and in the last year 19,072,000.

Sir, having placed before the Committee this general view of the condition of the trade and navigation of the country, I will, with their permission, proceed with what is the real business before us to-night—namely, to consider our financial position, and to ascertain clearly the charges upon the revenue of the country, and the means at our command to meet them. Since the commercial crisis raged with a fury which alarmed the whole kingdom, I need scarcely remind the Committee that there has been considerable restoration of confidence; and there are at this moment many circumstances which must conduce to the increased prosperity of the country. The rate of interest is very low; capital is abundant, money is cheap, and the price of the principal necessities of life and of the chief articles of consumption is much lower than it was during last year or the preceding year. I should not, however, be doing my duty to the Committee, if I concealed from them my own conviction, founded upon information which has been at my command, that, although the general condition of the country is at this moment sound, and although there has been a restoration of confidence and there are numerous indications of improvement, we are not justified in indulging a belief that there will be a rapid recurrence of that spirit of speculative enterprise which has prevailed of late years, and which has undoubtedly furnished very beneficial contributions to the Exchequer.

I will now proceed to state the estimated expenditure for the year 1858-59. The charge for the funded and unfunded debts I place at 28,400,000*l*. The Committee will observe that there is a decrease upon that charge to the extent of 150,000*l*. This has been occasioned by the liquidation of the 2,000,000*l*. of Exchequer bonds last year, by some diminution of the rate of interest upon Exchequer bills, and by some operation of the Sinking Fund upon the public debt. The next item of expenditure is that for the permanent charge on the Consolidated Fund. That is an item which, I am sorry to say, I felt it my duty to increase. Last year the charge was, I think, 1,770,000*l*.; but I have not felt justified this year in placing the amount at less than 1,900,000*l*. I have felt it my duty to make an increase in this item in consequence of the compensation which the House awarded—I think, in a moment of almost reckless liberality—to proctors and other officials who deemed themselves injured by the passing of a measure of reform of the Ecclesiastical Courts. The charge for the army, including the disembodied militia, and reduced by the amount stated the other night by my right honourable friend the Secretary for War, will be 11,750,000*l*. The charge for the navy, including the packet service, which has been reduced by my right honourable friend the First Lord of the Admiralty by some 300,000*l*., will be 9,860,000*l*. The Civil Service estimates, which last year amounted to 7,400,000*l*., are not at this moment entirely settled. There has been considerable difficulty in getting in these estimates, and in examining and revising them; but I have no hesitation in saying that I do not estimate this item at more than 7,000,000*l*. for the present year; and there will therefore be a reduction under this head, as compared with the charge last year, of 400,000*l*.

The Committee will allow me to make a few remarks upon these estimates. There is at all times a very great desire to reduce the amount of the Civil Service estimates—what used to be called in old days the Miscellaneous estimates. We very often find that honourable gentlemen who are perfectly ready to support a considerable expenditure for what are called the great services, loudly demand that economy should be practised

in the Miscellaneous estimates. If in the vindication of their estimates the Government appeal to the State necessity, which requires the maintenance of a large establishment, they are always told, 'There are the Miscellaneous estimates; that is the item upon which you ought to economise. If an army must be maintained upon a great scale, and if the navy—the national and favourite service—must be kept up, at all events the Miscellaneous estimates contain some extravagant items, which require excision by the financial knife, and that is the means by which economy must be practised.' Now, although the Civil Service estimates are not yet upon the table, I wish the House to consider the nature of those estimates. No. 3 is the estimate for Law and Justice, and the amount has increased considerably every year. No. 4 relates to the subject of Education, a question which always excites the deepest interest in this House. That item has advanced in amount year by year, with a giant's pace. I do not mean on an occasion like the present, to express an opinion one way or the other, as to the policy of this expenditure—my business to-night is to give the Committee clear and complete information as to the financial position of the country; but it is necessary for me, in illustrating the system of our expenditure, to call attention to the nature of these Civil Service estimates. I will take this item for Education. I believe that when the first vote for that object was passed by the House about twenty years ago, its amount was not more than 30,000*l*. In ten years the vote had reached the sum of 248,000*l*. Ten years more have passed, and the expenditure under this head, for England and Ireland, including the schools of art, will for the present year be not less than 1,000,000*l*. sterling.

Now, I do not say we have not been perfectly right in pursuing the course which the House has hitherto taken in this respect. All I wish is, that the Committee should clearly understand what they are doing. And do not let it be supposed that the Civil Service estimates, which have been thus constantly increasing, can be reduced in an offhand manner. Under this particular head, for instance, there has been a vast system gradually developing itself, which, in a very short time,

will amount to the outlay of a great department. When I saw the amount which this year would be incurred under the head of Education; when I remembered that regularly, every year, there had been a large augmentation in the votes for that object; I felt it my duty to form some opinion of what would be the future of this growing branch of our outgoings, and of what means we have of controlling this expenditure, or of ascertaining generally the relation in which that department was placed to the Exchequer of this country. Now, Sir, after having examined the subject—and giving no opinion, I beg the Committee to observe, upon the policy or the impolicy of this establishment, but only anxious that honourable gentlemen should clearly understand the responsible position they occupy in reference to this matter—it is my deliberate conviction that a system is now rapidly developing itself in this department of our expenditure, which in a very few years, will arrive at the amount of at least 3,000,000*l.* or 4,000,000*l.* sterling. And I think the time has come when the House should calmly review the course they are pursuing in this respect, and, at all events, comprehend the liability they are incurring. Sir, the item for the revenue collection is 4,700,000*l.* The total expenditure for the various departments is 63,610,000*l.* There is a liability for the War Sinking Fund of 1,500,000*l.*, besides 2,000,000*l.* of Exchequer bonds, which must be liquidated in the early part of next month. Thus, the total charge for the year 1858–9 is 67,110,000*l.* I now proceed, Sir, to estimate the resources from which we are to meet those liabilities. I will therefore give our estimate of the revenue for the year 1858–59. The estimate of my right honourable predecessor for the customs was 22,350,000*l.*, and the actual sum paid into the Exchequer was 23,109,000*l.* Now, in forming an estimate of the probable amount to be received from the customs for this year, we must in the first place observe that, although the amount paid under this head into the Exchequer was 23,109,000*l.*, the net receipt of this department for the year was 23,289,000*l.*, or, not to perplex the Committee with odd numbers, 23,300,000*l.* That difference between the net receipt of the customs and the sum paid into the Exchequer was occasioned by certain advances made

to the departments of the customs, which were mainly owing to the changes rendered necessary in consequence of the great resolution decided upon by this House of paying the gross revenue into the Exchequer. Therefore, in calculating what the customs may produce this year, we must really take as our basis the actual net receipts, not the amount paid into the Exchequer, which was lessened in its passage thither by the sum of 200,000*l.*, to which that department will not be liable in another year.

In considering the probable result of the customs' duties this year, we must also remember that, since the late commercial panic and disaster, they have exhibited great buoyancy. We must remember that all the circumstances of the country are now favourable to consumption. Capital is abundant, money cheap, bread between 40 and 50 per cent. lower in price than it was last year, and of sugar, which was very high and scarce last year, we have the prospect of ample supplies, while its cost has fallen considerably—so much, indeed, as 10*s.* per cwt.—and thereby has become much more accessible to the working classes. In fact, there is a combination of causes at work which, under ordinary circumstances, would all stimulate consumption. We must further remember there is one great influence calculated to be most advantageous to the Exchequer—namely, that the country is now beginning to feel the benefit of that great remission of taxation which the House determined upon last year. No doubt, when the revenue rallied at the end of the last quarter of the past year, that result was to be attributed in some degree to the restoration of confidence which had taken place, and to the gradual, even rapid decline in the value of money. But it is impossible to shut our eyes to the conclusion that what has mainly sustained our revenue—what has supported and even stimulated consumption, at a time when there was great commercial disturbance and depression—has been the action of that 9,000,000*l.* of remitted taxation which was brought into the pockets of the people, but which was brought into their pockets only towards the end of the year. Because the Committee will recollect that, although the Government, influenced by the feelings of the country and the determina-

tion of the House, remitted the 9,000,000*l.* produced by the war income-tax at the commencement of the year, six months elapsed before the relief could be felt by the public, owing to the manner in which the income-tax is collected. For the first six months the country paid the war 9*d.*; and it was only at the latter end of the year, at the period when all this distress existed, and when so much commercial disturbance and depression were experienced, that suddenly the consuming power of the nation was supported by the public having at their command this great remission of taxation. And I think I may say, in passing, that this fact is a sufficient vindication of those who counselled at that time the expediency of reducing the burdens of the country to that amount. Now, we shall reap the great benefit of that measure in our customs' duties this year. I should not be acting fairly to the Committee if I did not state that, though the customs last year produced 23,289,000*l.*, that amount was swollen by a large sum paid for tea-duties in April 1857 which properly belonged to the preceding year, in consequence of the alteration of those duties. It would not be right to omit from our calculation that 400,000*l.* paid for tea-duties ought really to have been included in the returns for 1856-57. But taking all these circumstances into consideration; taking the amount last year realised upon customs, notwithstanding the commercial crisis, at 23,300,000*l.* in round numbers; allowing in my estimate for the present year a loss, or rather a diminution, in the tea-duties of about 200,000*l.* for the present year; calculating the produce of those duties upon the amount which probably will be consumed by the public in the present year; deducting from that amount 3,500,000 lbs. to meet the extraordinary accession to the Exchequer to which I have referred—and remembering also that, so far as this article is concerned, the prospects of the tea trade are extremely favourable, there having scarcely been any period at which the supplies were more promising—I think I am justified in placing the amount of the customs at 23,400,000*l.*, or 100,000*l.* more than they yielded last year. I now come, Sir, to the next great source of supply to our revenue—the excise. The right honourable gentleman the member for Radnor esti-

mated the amount to be realised from that source at 17,000,000*l.*, and, notwithstanding all the distress of last year, it actually produced 17,825,000. This item I have ventured, after the greatest consideration and guided by what I believe to be the best information, to put at 18,100,000*l.*; the excise being subject to all those beneficial influences which act upon the customs, and which, like the customs, have, since the great remission of taxation and the reduction of the price of money and all other commodities, exhibited the same elastic and buoyant character.

The next article is stamps, which were estimated last year at 7,450,000*l.*, and realised 7,416,000*l.* The stamps are a branch of our revenue which is acted upon by all the circumstances which also influence those departments that depend upon the consumption of the country. The state of the mercantile world acts very quickly upon the revenue arising from stamps. The stamps suffered much during the commercial crisis and the period immediately subsequent to it, and they have since shown the same elasticity as the customs and the excise. It is also to be remembered that the succession-duty will, in the year which has now commenced, contribute much more to the revenue than it has hitherto done, and therefore I have taken the stamps at 7,550,000*l.*, which is exactly the amount fixed by my predecessor in his statement of last year, when he favoured the House with a prospective estimate of the year in which we now are. The next item is Land and Assessed Taxes. The estimated revenue from this source was 3,150,000*l.*; the actual produce is 3,152,000*l.*, and, considering the great number of new houses which have been built and are now building, I have put it for the year 1858-59 at 3,200,000*l.* We now come to the property and income tax, which falls this year to 5*d.* in the pound. For the first half of the year it was at 7*d.*, and the second half at 5*d.*, and the produce of the tax I have therefore put at 6,100,000*l.*, which is the rate at which it has always been put. The next item is the Post Office. The estimate for the Post Office was 3,000,000*l.*, but it has only paid into the Exchequer 2,920,000*l.* That reduced production of the Post Office, however, was occasioned by similar circumstances to those which I have mentioned as



having an influence upon the customs' revenue. The Post Office had to advance considerable sums to its departments, which advances it will not have to make again; they are permanent though fluctuating balances. The revenue of the Post Office, therefore, is not to be measured by its present produce, 2,920,000*l.*, but I am assured by the highest authority that I may safely place it for the present year at 3,200,000*l.* The next item, the Crown lands, was estimated last year at 265,000*l.*; they produced 277,000*l.* I place them for 1858-59 at 270,000*l.* The last article of estimated revenue is the Miscellaneous. This was estimated last year at 1,200,000*l.*; the produce obtained was 1,600,000*l.*, and I have placed it at 1,300,000*l.* I know this is an item which is often viewed with suspicion when the financial statement is made. It would be in my power to explain in detail all the items of which this head of revenue is made up. I only refrain from doing so lest I should weary the Committee. There are twelve sources of supply from whence this item is drawn, and having gone through them all carefully, I think I may, without the slightest apprehension, place them at that sum.

Sir, I have now shown that the expenditure and liabilities of the year amount to 67,110,000*l.*, and I have estimated our revenue at 63,120,000*l.*; there awaits us, therefore, a deficiency to be made up to the amount of 3,990,000*l.* I have no information as to what may have been the expectation of the Committee on this point, though I know from many quarters and by many means what is the expectation of the country; but whether the Committee thinks this an overwhelming or only a vast deficit, it is at all events a deficit which should make us pause and steadily consider the mode in which to encounter it. But I may perhaps be permitted, before entering on this consideration, to make a single observation on the deficit; and it is one which ought to be consolatory to the country. This deficit, however vast it may be, has not been occasioned by any falling off in our resources. I do not know how I could place that more clearly before the Committee than by assuming for a moment that there was not that reduction from our revenue which has been occasioned by the income-tax falling

from 7*l.* to 5*l.* The consequence would be that our revenue would be 1,000,000*l.* more in amount. The deficit, then, would be about 3,000,000*l.*; and if we deduct from that the amount of our engagements to pay off debt—namely, 3,500,000*l.*—it follows that if we had no engagements to meet, and if we had no cessation of taxation, instead of a deficit we should have a surplus of 500,000*l.* Therefore, in dealing with this very grave and serious subject, it is a source of consolation to us that this is a deficit which, notwithstanding the sharp fortunes experienced by the country during the year, has not been occasioned by any diminution in our resources.

I propose to consider this deficit under two heads. I will consider, first, the amount of deficit which has been occasioned by our undertaking to pay off debt; and, in the second place, the amount which has been caused by a cessation of taxation. It appears to me that this will be the simplest and the most intelligible manner of treating the subject. First, then, with regard to that amount of the deficit, 3,500,000*l.*, which is occasioned by our engagement to pay off debt. The first item to which I wish to call the attention of the Committee is the War Sinking Fund, the amount of which is 1,500,000*l.* The Committee is perfectly aware that, irrespective of the War Sinking Fund, there is a General Sinking Fund, which is in operation. Thirty years ago, the system of a Sinking Fund that prevailed in this country was, to allot a certain fixed sum, without any reference to the state of the revenue, to the payment of debt. In the heat of the great war, the House of Commons passed a resolution that every year 5,000,000*l.*, ‘without fail’—those were the words, I believe—should be apportioned to the redemption of debt; and that system—the amount reserved being more or less in amount, but the principle being the same—prevailed until the year 1829. That system utterly broke down over and over again. It was false in principle and most injurious in practice. In 1829 a committee was appointed to consider the whole question. The committee investigated the subject with great acumen and depth, and it recommended the adoption of the only sound principle on which a Sinking Fund ought to be based—namely, the application of the surplus revenue of the

country to the liquidation of its debt. That surplus was to be ascertained by every quarter taking the surplus of the year, and—popularly describing the principle of the Act—devoting the natural surplus of the revenue to the liquidation of the debt. Well, in the course of the last year, when loans were incurred, the House thought fit to recur to the old system upon which Sinking Funds were established—namely, allotting a fixed sum, without any reference to the state of the revenue, to the liquidation of debt; and, while they thus recurred to the old system, with strange inconsistency, I think, they did not supersede the new one which in 1829 had been established in its stead, and which was founded upon a totally different principle. When that proposition was made, it did not pass without discussion in this House. Objections were raised to it by persons of great authority. There was a debate of some length, and there was a division. At the moment it appeared to me that the Government were not very much enamoured of their own plan, or confident in the policy which they were recommending; but the House thought fit—mainly influenced, I think, by one who upon such subjects, if, indeed, not upon all subjects, addresses the House with authority, my honourable friend the member for Huntingdon (Mr. T. Baring)—to agree to this revival of the old principle of the Sinking Fund. But my honourable friend the member for Huntingdon, when he recommended that course, recommended it for special reasons. He said, ‘We are now, or soon shall be, in a time of perfect peace; and it is not until we are at perfect peace that this Sinking Fund is to come into operation. Therefore, on the whole, I think it wisest to secure the liquidation of debt, incurred in war, during a time of profound peace.’

I shall not go into the question whether we are now in a time of profound peace, lest I should introduce into this discussion, which should of all discussions be calm and temperate, elements of angry controversy. It is very likely that my noble friend the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs might, if I applied to him, express himself to be of the same opinion as the noble lord the member for Tiverton, and diplomatically assure me that we are not at war with China. I am not a diplomatist;

I have only charge of the finances of the country; but when I want to reduce the estimates, and look to those of the navy, for instance, I cannot help thinking that although we are at peace with China, that peace has a most warlike influence on our expenditure. Therefore, the ground on which my honourable friend the member for Huntingdon supported the establishment of that Sinking Fund—namely, that we were entirely at peace, or should be so when it came into operation—has not arisen; and knowing that on these subjects my honourable friend very much agrees with me, taking the plain view of these affairs in China, I am convinced that, even with his view of the case, he never contemplated that the Sinking Fund should be brought into action at a time when, whether we are at peace or war, we are fitting out armaments, and have a great naval force in the Chinese waters. But, Sir, besides the Sinking Fund of 1829—that is, the General Sinking Fund—and the War Sinking Fund, which this year comes into complete operation, we have also (to which I shall afterwards refer) the engagement to pay off 2,000,000*l.* of Exchequer bonds.

Now, I ask the Committee calmly to consider in what position we are placing the finances of the country and its commerce, which is now in a state of some depression, and not able or inclined to bear an increase of taxation—I ask the House to consider in what position we are placing the finances of the country by the principle of paying off the debt which we have sanctioned. Last year you had the General Sinking Fund; you had the Special Sinking Fund; you had engagements in the shape of Exchequer bonds; all acting upon your finances. There absolutely was the sum of the National Debt<sup>1</sup> redeemed by the operation of the General Sinking Fund. That you will find in the accounts upon the table. It was not a very large amount, but positively there was a sum of the National Debt redeemed by the action of the General Sinking Fund. Then you had the Special Sinking Fund coming partially into operation, to the extent of 250,000*l.*; then you had 2,000,000*l.* of Exchequer bonds. Now, let me show what is the practical result of these artificial attempts to pay debt, when you have

<sup>1</sup> 269,908*l.* 0*s.* 6*d.*

not a revenue which affords you a natural surplus of the income of the year for the operation. Here is the account of the public income and expenditure of the year just concluded, from which I will read only one item. Our expenditure amounted to 70,000,000*l.*, and our income also to a very great amount; but although we are dealing with these immense sums, you will find that there is an excess of expenditure over income. Our income amounted last year to 68,000,000*l.*, and yet our expenditure exceeded that amount by, in round numbers, 2,500,000*l.*; but when I go to the other side of the balance sheet and look at the expenditure, I find there a sum absorbed by the Sinking Fund, by the redemption of Exchequer bonds, and by the liquidation of public debt, amounting to 2,250,000*l.*, or only 250,000*l.* less than the excess of expenditure. Well, what follows? It follows that you certainly have paid off debt, but you have not paid off debt out of your revenue. You must have paid it out of the balance of the Exchequer.

The Committee must feel that that is a system which, though upon one occasion it might answer, cannot be continued. The Committee, therefore, must now consider this: what is the consequence of bringing past and present burdens to act simultaneously upon the revenue of the year? The only consequence can be war-taxation in time of peace; and can you have this war-taxation in time of peace consistently with that commercial prosperity on which you depend, and of which you so often talk? I must, therefore, ask the Committee to consider whether the time has not come at which, not merely with reference to this year, but with reference to future years, and with regard to those results as to taxation which we wish and are almost pledged to accomplish, we must consider the policy of maintaining this system of artificial Sinking Funds. In principle I think it highly fallacious and erroneous; and in its application there has been a greater mistake, because, independently of the circumstance that you are maintaining two Sinking Funds at the present moment on contrary principles; independently of the consideration that the old Sinking Fund is, in my mind, built upon a sure foundation and upon sound principles; admitting for a moment that the War Sinking Fund

is right in principle, still I think it wrong in its application, because it never ought to have been brought into operation until you had paid off your Exchequer bonds. This triple action upon your revenue to pay off debt can only end either in increased taxation or loans, which for such an object would be absurd ; or in financial embarrassment, which all of us would desire to avoid.

Now, Sir, I ask the Committee calmly to consider this question. You have a deficit, of which 3,500,000*l.* are occasioned by engagements to pay off debt. You have no surplus ; you have no means of meeting these debts in the present year. How, then, will you meet them ? Will you raise a loan ? Will you raise a loan to fulfil engagements to pay off debt, part of which consists of an artificial Sinking Fund ? Could there be a more blundering means of setting your house in order and squaring your accounts than negotiating a loan to meet engagements of that kind ? Is it not the last resource of individuals in distress, to raise money in order to pay debts, and to get deeper in debt in consequence ? I cannot suppose that anyone in this House would seriously sanction the idea that we ought to raise a loan to fulfil engagements to pay off debts. Well, then, is the Committee prepared to meet these engagements by taxation ? It is very difficult to say how you could raise a sum of 3,500,000*l.* by taxes. It is rather a perplexing question. But suppose you were resolved to do it, that would not get you out of the difficulty. If you were to raise by taxes a sum of 3,500,000*l.* to pay these debts, you would still have a deficit of 500,000*l.* You would have to make provision for that, and also to provide some surplus. Therefore, if you come to taxes, it is a question of raising a sum exceeding 4,000,000*l.*

Well, Sir, under these circumstances, and analysing these claims upon us, I think that the time has arrived, not merely with reference to the convenience of the moment, but in order to put our finances for future years in a secure position, when we ought to come to some determination respecting this War Sinking Fund. I would humbly recommend the Committee to terminate that arrangement, either by repealing the Act, which is, I think, false in principle and injurious in practice, or, at least, by suspending its operation until the other engagements

into which we have entered—namely, these Exchequer bonds—are provided for. I feel certain that it will be utterly impossible, with public advantage, to maintain the system which now exists by law, to which the wisest men of all times have expressed an adverse opinion; which the labours of a learned and distinguished committee of this House, in devising a general Sinking Fund, have really superseded; and which is not needed to maintain the credit, while if preserved it will impair the finances, of the country. Therefore I shall recommend to the Committee, so far as that 1,500,000*l.* a year is concerned, a course which, for the present certainly, shall prevent its embarrassing the finances of the country. We have now to deal with 2,500,000*l.* of deficit, if the Committee sanction the course which I have just proposed, and I must say that I view the engagement which we have entered into with regard to the Exchequer bonds in a very different light and spirit from that in which I view the War Sinking Fund. I have been told that there is the easiest possible way of meeting that portion of the deficit, and that is, to fund it; but if I were to take that course, it would be one which, in my mind, would be quite unjustifiable; unless, indeed, the country were in an emergency in which all the principles of finance must give way to political considerations. But in times like these in which we find ourselves, I think it would be highly undesirable and improper to contemplate such a course, seeing that it would be totally contrary to the conditions into which the Parliament and the Government of the country entered when they agreed to issue these terminable securities. It would be to me, I confess, a source of the greatest satisfaction to meet, and to meet to the hour, those engagements; but there is a great deal to be considered before we arrive at that conclusion. With regard to a loan, I imagine there is but one feeling on both sides of the House—namely, that, whatever may be the deficit, that is the last expedient to which we must have recourse. To these Exchequer bonds, however, applies the same difficulty which applies to the War Sinking Fund. If they are to be met by a new tax, it must be an excessive tax to produce upwards of 2,000,000*l.*; and when it has produced that amount, where are you? Still in deficit.

But if you cannot meet them immediately, I think, at all events, that the Committee will agree that the spirit of the engagements should be fulfilled—that they should be engagements which we are resolved to meet out of the revenue of the country, and that we should guard as much as possible against their ever becoming a permanent addition to the public debt. Still, seeing the deficiency that awaits me, even if those engagements are provided for, and anxious as I should be at once to provide for them, I feel it my duty, in order to place the finances of the country, not merely for this year, but for future years, in a position which I think will be advantageous to the country, to recommend to the Committee to postpone for some period the payment of the Exchequer bonds; but to consent to arrangements which, so far as I can form an opinion, will secure their being paid out of the revenue of the country, and which will place our general finances in such a position that they will form no obstacle to those arrangements which I think it would be for the interest of the country to adopt. I will postpone describing, however, to a future portion of my remarks—when the time will naturally arrive that I should touch upon this portion of the subject more particularly—the mode in which I propose that the arrangements should be accomplished. Now, Sir, I have considered that part of the deficit which is occasioned by engagements to pay debts, and which is no doubt much the most considerable portion of it. There is next a part of the deficit to be considered which, though not so large in proportion, is of a character which must be regarded in a severer light than the other; because we cannot reconcile ourselves to arrangements which in any other case may be justifiable or necessary, when the deficit is occasioned—no matter what may have been the original cause—by an absolute falling off in the revenue. An absolute falling off in the revenue must be met by means which will not only supply the deficiency, but will also place the general condition of the revenue in a sound and satisfactory state. This portion of the deficit has been occasioned by the cessation of a tax, and that tax one of a memorable character—one to which we cannot bring our minds free from considerations beyond those of a merely fiscal and financial character;



and it certainly appears to me that upon the decision of the Committee, with respect to that source of deficit, the future satisfactory management of the finances of the country will very much depend. Sir, the property and income tax has long and frequently occupied the consideration of this House. I think I may say that it has never ceased to occupy the thoughts and to interest the feelings of the country. It is a tax the importance of which is not to be measured simply by its financial results. Those who pay it do not consider merely the sums which they yield to the Exchequer, but the mode in which it is assessed, and the manner in which it is levied ; so that from the earliest time that it has occupied the consideration of Parliament to the present, social and political principles have been involved in its character and consideration.

It is not necessary for me to remind the Committee of the manner in which this tax has habitually and traditionally been described in Parliament. The epithets which were applied to it, and in which the greatest men have been used to characterise it, are in the memory, as they have often been on the lips, of gentlemen on both sides of this House ; that it is ‘unjust, unequal, and inquisitorial,’ all of us have felt, and most of us have acknowledged. There are, I think, two great classes of reasons why the income-tax should not form a permanent feature of our finance. The first class I may call domestic ; the second springs rather from considerations of an external character. The feeling of the community generally of the inequality, of the injustice, and of the odious nature of this tax, has unfortunately been sanctioned and concurred in by all those statesmen who have felt the necessity of levying it ; and it has been impossible to maintain it for any considerable time, or to adopt it as a permanent feature of our financial system, without great acerbity of feeling and much violent controversy being excited as to its character and its incidence. If you wish to establish it you have an endless crowd of controversies of the most angry character upon these among other points : whether there shall be recognised a difference between property and income assessment ; whether, if that difference be not acknowledged, a difference shall be admitted between precarious and permanent

incomes ; whether there shall be a difference between incomes derived from trade and incomes derived from professions ; whether the poor man shall be exempted, and what a poor man really is ; what is income and what are wages ; who shall be exempted ; where ought the line of exemption to be drawn ; and the convenience of an exemption which shall exclude all but those who are called rich.

These are some of the subjects which have always been raised in this country when an attempt has been made to establish the income-tax for any lengthened period. These agitations have not of late prevailed. But why, let me ask, has that been the case ? It is because in 1853, after a great deal of agitation throughout the country upon this subject had taken place ; after a committee had sat for two years to investigate it ; and after all sorts of plans and expedients devised by every manner of man had been considered in reference to it, an eminent member of this House (Mr. Gladstone) brought forward a great financial scheme in which, acknowledging the impossibility of reconstructing this tax upon principles of justice—upon principles which could satisfy the fair demands and expectations of society—he submitted to the notice of the House a proposition, the effect of which would be to secure its diminution and final extinction at the end of a certain term of years. That scheme was brought forward with consummate ability ; and having been supported in the House of Commons by an overwhelming majority, created the conviction in the public mind that in its spirit the arrangement would be carried into effect, and that the financial policy which was in 1853 propounded was one which both Parliament and the country had cordially embraced and sanctioned. I do not wish to overstate the case. To do so would not be to my interest, as it certainly is not my inclination. I shall not say that a solemn compact was entered into at the time to which I allude between Parliament and the country upon this subject, which should be regarded as independent of all circumstances and events. That is a position which it would be wild and idle to assume, and absurd to attempt to uphold. There were, however, arrangements cordially entered into, and in the same spirit understood, and

which the country expected would be religiously fulfilled if the interposition of extraordinary circumstances did not render their fulfilment impossible. Well, circumstances of that character did take place. A great national emergency occurred, and what, let me ask, in that hour did that people do who had previously murmured at the injustice of the principle upon which the income-tax was established? When the safety of the country was endangered; when her honour and her best interests were at stake; what did they do who, before the arrangement of the right honourable gentleman the member for the University of Oxford was brought forward—an arrangement which they had cordially accepted—had complained of the unequal mode in which this tax was levied upon the various classes of the community: what, I repeat, did they do when the scheme the right honourable gentleman devised was not only arrested in its progress, but the tax itself made the increased source from which the power of England flowed forth to support the honour and interests of the country? Did they murmur? Not for an instant. On the contrary, everybody did his utmost to prove to England and to the world that there was no burden to which our people would hesitate to contribute at a moment of national emergency; the income-tax was raised to a very large amount, and during the period to which I refer, when the country clearly understood that it was absolutely necessary this increased income-tax should continue to be levied, not a voice was raised against its imposition. It was not until peace had been secured that the nation called for a remission of the war taxation in this particular. When that great object was happily attained, we heard again the expression of its expectation that the arrangement of 1853 would be carried into effect.

There can be no doubt that the breaking out of the war caused a considerable difference in our position as compared with that in which we stood at the period at which the arrangement was originally introduced. The permanent charge on our debt had become in consequence largely increased. We became liable to encumbrances, such, for instance, as these Exchequer bonds, which must be met, and which constitute impediments in the way of adhering to the arrangements of 1853 that

ould not well be foreseen. These, however, are circumstances which a sensible people would not fail to accept as furnishing good grounds for delay in the diminution or extinction of the income-tax. They do not, however, constitute sufficiently strong reasons why the country should be prepared to regard the arrangement of 1853 as visionary and fantastic. I cannot help feeling, then, that if on these grounds the arrangement was to be wholly abandoned there would be a very natural sentiment of disappointment among the people. Such a disappointment would be calculated to irritate them, and, therefore, looking to those domestic considerations which undoubtedly prevail—namely, that the very principle of the tax is one which creates public discontent, and is calculated to irritate the public mind—it is highly inexpedient that it should form a permanent feature of our financial system. I may now be permitted to advert to other grounds which, although they may not so generally influence public opinion as those which I have just mentioned, yet are, I think, well deserving of our consideration in dealing with this important question. They embrace considerations arising out of the occurrence of some extraordinary emergency, and are of a political nature. Is it not of the highest importance, I would ask, that the sovereign of this country should, notwithstanding the immense revenue which is annually raised to support the vast establishments of this country, be able, with the concurrence of her Parliament, to touch at any moment, as it were by a spring, a source of revenue which in an hour of great emergency would yield 20,000,000*l.* or 25,000,000*l.* sterling, a sum equal to those large loans which foreign potentates raise at a ruinous rate of interest, and one of which almost exhausts the resources of their subjects; that year after year, notwithstanding the large sums raised for the purposes of general revenue, the sovereign of this country should be able to raise during a war an enormous sum, without a murmur on the lips of a single person in the dominions? That is a reason drawn from political considerations—and I know that the right honourable gentleman the member for the University of Oxford has advocated the proposition in language more unequivocal than any other states-

man in this House—that the income-tax should not be allowed to constitute a permanent feature of our financial system.

But, Sir, although that may be my opinion, and although I cannot but think it is the opinion of the great majority of the House of Commons; although there are grounds of the highest political expediency which render it desirable that the arrangement of 1853 should be carried out in spirit, if not in the letter, it is still undoubtedly possible that the country, anxious as it may be to witness the realisation of its expectations in that respect, and having the utmost confidence that Parliament is really and in all sincerity disposed to meet its wishes upon the point, still may not be unprepared, knowing that a deficiency in the revenue exists, to submit to the burden of the income-tax which it bore last year. The people of England may say, ‘A very great deficit lies before us. It is not, after all, so great as we thought it would be some time ago. If we submit to an income-tax at the same rate as that of last year, we shall get rid of this deficit, and we must trust to the future.’ Now, that is a view of the case which it is my duty to place before the House. We have a deficit in our revenues, not occasioned by our engagements to pay a debt, but by a cessation of taxes, which deficit must be made good by taxation, and which would be converted into a surplus if the Committee should think proper to continue the income-tax for another year at the same rate as last year. The Committee may take that course, and take it, too, with the sincere intention of carrying the scheme of the right honourable gentleman the member for the University of Oxford into effect. But there are other considerations which ought to influence our decisions with respect to this question.

The country has behaved extremely well during the last five years in matters of taxation. At no period of English history has so much public spirit been exhibited upon the part of the community in that particular, and I think that that spirit is worthy of all respect. There is no doubt that this country generally has this question of the income-tax greatly at heart. It has for a long time clung to the belief that, notwithstanding the adverse circumstances which have interposed, there has

existed on the part of Parliament a sincere intention to diminish and eventually extinguish this tax; and I cannot but feel that if I were to ask you to take a course which would look like breaking your promises with the nation in that respect, and to seek to get out of our difficulty by again passing a law which would prevent the remission, I should be calling upon you to adopt a policy which would be but too well calculated to sour the public mind. The result of such a policy would be that, when a great emergency again arose, you would not then be in a position to appeal to the country with the same success, or to expect to have your appeal met with the same cordial response which upon a recent occasion awaited the minister who had the direction of the national finances. I feel, therefore, bound to announce it as the deliberate opinion of Her Majesty's ministers, that the deficit in the revenue which I have brought under your notice ought not to be supplied by proposing an increase in the income-tax. But, Sir, if the income-tax is not to be disturbed; if the income-tax for this year is only to give us the reduced rate of 5*d.*—and we propose that course—the House must feel that it is absolutely necessary to support the revenue of the country by the imposition of new taxes.

I know that I may be told by some gentlemen that you can obtain the relief you want by a reduction of expenditure. Allow me to say that reduction of expenditure is not a task that can be undertaken in haste and heat. It requires time—deep, protracted, and minute investigation—and although it might be very easy to effect certain reductions, which might be very popular in the House for the moment, yet unless they are well considered and founded on mature investigation and ample knowledge, they would only lead to a swift and fatal reaction and to increased expenditure. Now, we have made some reductions in expenditure. We have made reductions which could be made with safety, and in amount not contemptible. Allow me to say that in meeting the difficult financial position we have had to encounter a reduction in expenditure of 800,000*l.*, which we have made this year, is an item not to be despised. But let me impress upon the Committee that which I have presumed to say on previous occasions: reduction depends on policy. It

carried out. The mode in which I would attempt mainly to supply the deficiency is, by asking the House to agree to a proposition which appears to me reasonable and wise. I would ask them to agree to equalise the duties on spirits. The Committee will recollect that we have been legislating on this subject now for several years. We have, consequently, great experience to guide us as to the course we should adopt, and the results we may obtain. I think it was in 1853 that the duties on English, Scotch, and Irish spirits were raised. They were raised considerably with great benefit to the Exchequer, with increased consumption, and without the slightest appearance of illicit distillation. They were, I believe, in the following years increased with the same result. In 1855 the right honourable gentleman the member for Radnor (Sir George Lewis) equalised the duties on English and Scotch spirits. Well, that was a step taken with some apprehension; but what was the consequence? Great advantage to the revenue, increased consumption, no appearance of illicit distillation, and, stranger than all, the greatest benefit was experienced by the Scotch, whose duties were raised. That may appear a paradox; but it is a dry fact, and is accounted for in a moment, because, by the raising of the duty, they were freed from embarrassing and ruinous restrictions, and had the full enjoyment of the markets of England.

We have much experience, I say again, to guide us. Since 1855, the duties on spirits have been raised, having been equalised between England and Scotland, while a differential duty still remains in favour of Ireland. The duties have again been raised, and the results have been equally satisfactory. I have taken some pains to obtain the best information on the subject, and, from what I hear, there is not the slightest appearance of illicit distillation. Look at the position of Ireland. At this moment the only differential duty that remains between Ireland and Great Britain is the differential duty on spirits. I am sure that my Irish friends, who are always demanding justice for Ireland, and who define that justice to consist in an identity of institutions, of rights, of duties, cannot on reflection consider the position in which they are placed by this dif-

duties throughout the three kingdoms. That measure will give to the Exchequer the sum of at least 500,000*l.*, which is the amount of the deficit.

I am much obliged to the Committee for bearing with me while I have submitted to them this somewhat lengthened statement; but I am sure they will remember my position is not one of ordinary difficulty, because I have been obliged by process of analysis to operate upon a large deficit, and, of course, to touch upon many circumstances. The Committee will now consider that if the course which I humbly recommend be adopted, the deficit has disappeared. We have put an end to the War Sinking Fund, or postponed its operation to the happy day when the Exchequer bonds shall be paid out of our revenue; we have agreed to an arrangement, to which I shall hereafter revert, with reference to our Exchequer bonds, and prevented them from forming any obstacle in the way of placing our financial system fairly in order; and, lastly, by the proposal to equalise the duties on spirits, we have entirely got rid of the deficit. But I deem it advisable, besides, that we should add something to the revenue in the shape of a surplus. I shall not press much upon the resources of the country or the patience of the Committee in this respect, because the state of our balances is very satisfactory, and because a very large and unusual amount will be added to them in the course of this year. Nay, if I had chosen to avail myself of it, a sum of 400,000*l.* might fairly be brought into the revenue of the year. I have thought it best, however, not to bolster up the finances, and I have felt that on the whole the Committee would rather see the case under- than over-stated. But the East India Company, who owed to the State 1,500,000*l.*, have already paid 1,000,000*l.* of that sum towards the reduction of the war expenditure of this year. This amount was lent out of revenue, and it was agreed that it should be paid in to revenue. There is yet 400,000*l.*, therefore, which, strictly speaking, might fairly take credit for the Budget; but I thought it best, on the whole, to make an unvarnished statement to the Committee. Nevertheless, that 400,000*l.* will at all events be paid into the Exchequer. Then there is a balance upon repayments



over advances of this year of probably not less than 600,000*l.* There are also moneys to be paid, both on account of the interest and the sinking fund of the Sardinian loan. There are, too, other items: so that a very large sum will be paid in the course of the year to the account of our balances, which, as the Committee will have observed from the balance-sheet, were themselves at the end of the year in a satisfactory position. This, therefore, seeing the state of the balances of the Exchequer; remembering (which is really the fact) that in the estimate of revenue which I have placed before the Committee, I have most scrupulously refrained from indulging in any but moderate expectations, feeling, indeed, that if I had adopted the sanguine views which many persons in authority would have sanctioned, I might have ventured on much more cheerful figures; looking, moreover at the great efforts which the country has made, I should not have thought it necessary, under all these circumstances, to trouble the Committee much on the subject of a surplus. But a surplus of some kind ought, I believe, to be provided, even though it be a small one; and, confident in the resources of the revenue, I think a small one should, under the circumstances, suffice. Now, so far as I can form an opinion on the subject from conversation with men of business, there is no mode of taxation more popular than the application of stamps to various operations of commerce. No one feels the burden of it; it is a mode of taxation which, on the whole, occasions less annoyance than any other, and I think, in fact, it is rather popular.

The penny postage system first brought taxation by means of these slight stamps into fashion. People like to see vast results accomplished by slight means. I therefore propose that whenever we draw a cheque we should place a penny stamp upon it. I am assured by one who upon such a subject must be considered of the highest authority, and who has very completely mastered this question, that I may count on a sum of not less than 300,000*l.* from this source. Of course there may be objections to the tax, but every man who draws a cheque must remember that he has now to pay an income-tax of only 5*l.* instead of 7*l.*, and obtaining as he does the remission of the

income-tax, and seeing the foundation of its future extinction laid, he must feel that, under the circumstances, some sacrifice must be made. I hope, therefore, the Committee will agree with me that this is a mode of taxation, if it can be called such, which they will not refuse to sanction. Considering the position of the Exchequer at this moment, I am not prepared to ask the Committee to impose any other taxes. I would ask them, however, to permit me for a moment to remind them of what may be the position of this country in the year following the present; for, although we hear many taunts about 'prospective finance,' I think that any person in the office which I now have the honour to occupy would be greatly wanting in his duty if he brought forward any proposition without having exercised some foresight in regard to it, and weighed in some manner its influence upon our future prospects. Now let us see, if the arrangements which I have proposed are agreed to by the Committee, what will be our prospects in the year following this. You will have again a loss on the income-tax, as compared with your present revenue of 1,000,000*l.*; and assuming that all things remain the same, and that your revenue and expenditure are exactly what they are now, you will have a loss in 1859-60 of 1,000,000*l.* in your income-tax, while 2,000,000*l.* of Exchequer bonds will become due. You will have this 3,000,000*l.*, reduced by the amount of surplus which I may obtain this year; but say that you have to meet 3,000,000*l.* of deficit. Now, I put it to the Committee—is that a prospect which ought to alarm us? Can we entertain a doubt but that with a fair amount of commercial prosperity, with a fair revival of trade in this country, the resources of our revenue, aided by well-considered and wise retrenchments, will be sufficient under these circumstances to meet our engagement to pay these bonds, and to encounter that diminution of income? Well, if you do that—and I feel confident that you will be able, should no disaster against which human provision is unavailing overtake the country—in what position shall we stand in that famous 1860 which has been the pivot of modern finance? There are certainly 1,000,000*l.* of bonds due in that year; but you will have annuities to the amount of something

like 2,150,000*l.* per annum expiring at that time, when I hope and believe you will possess a large, abounding surplus of revenue; and you will be able, if not to the letter, at least in spirit, to accomplish the plan of the right honourable gentleman the member for the University of Oxford. It is for that reason, in order that we may act fairly, candidly and sincerely towards the country on this question; in order that the wise arrangements of the right honourable gentleman may be carried out, and that that great policy—for a great policy with regard to the income-tax I believe it to be—should be accomplished, that I shall propose not to encumber 1860 or 1861 with the whole of the bonds which at present we cannot meet, but I shall propose that in 1862 and 1863 1,000,000*l.* should be apportioned to each year. When that is done, I have little doubt the policy of 1853 will be carried into effect.

Sir, I now submit these propositions to the consideration of the Committee. When they recollect the expectations of the country as to the revenue, and the fact that at the end of last year—and, indeed, so lately as the period at which I assumed office—the estimated deficiency we should have to encounter was not less than 6,500,000*l.*, I hope they will not be dissatisfied that by the rallying of the revenue during the last quarter; by judicious retrenchments; by measures sound in principle and judicious in application, the immense deficit that so long brooded over the spirit and depressed the energy of the country has been dissipated and that, too, with a remission of taxation in respect to the particular impost most odious to the people, in a manner which guarantees an accomplishment of the policy of the right honourable gentleman the member for the University of Oxford. This result will, I think, be satisfactory to the country, as well as to the Committee, and I trust the propositions I have made will not only receive the candid consideration of the Committee, but obtain, after due thought and discussion, the cordial acceptance of the country.

## MR. GLADSTONE'S BUDGET, February 24, 1860.

[Mr. Disraeli himself says that the two speeches which follow, delivered respectively on February 24, 1860, and April 8, 1862, summarise Mr. Gladstone's financial career. 'The one passes judgment on his policy from 1853 to 1860, with a warning which has been almost literally fulfilled; the other reviews it from the passing of the French Treaty to the present day, 1862.' I have therefore thought it unnecessary to give any others on the same subject. The following was delivered on the occasion of a resolution moved by Mr. Ducane: 'That while this Committee is desirous to relieve the trade of the country from all duties of Customs which can safely be dispensed with, it does not think it expedient to add to the existing deficiency by diminishing the ordinary revenue, and is not prepared to disappoint the just expectations of the country by rendering necessary a large increase of the income-tax.' This was the year of the commercial treaty with France, when the great reduction in the wine duties was effected.]

**MR. DISRAELI:** I rise to answer the challenge of the right honourable gentleman, and to interpret that indignant negative which he heard from my friends behind, and which I should like to translate to the House. The right honourable gentleman has stated that the motion made by my honourable friend the member for Essex is one that impugns the whole policy of commercial legislation for the last eighteen years. He says that the measures which he has introduced and the policy which he recommends are precisely the same as those which on preceding occasions have received the sanction of Parliament and the approbation of the nation. He says that if the House accedes to this motion we are declaring that we entirely disapprove all that has been done in those eighteen years to revise our commercial code. But I join issue at once with the right honourable gentleman. I deny that there is

that similarity between the measures which he introduces and those to which he refers. Sir Robert Peel, in 1842, in 1845, and the right honourable gentleman himself, in 1853, certainly found or made deficits, but when they proposed a tax like the income-tax it was for a period which covered the interval during which the experiment might have fair play, which would rally the revenue, and bring about the result that was held forth to the House as probable and desirable. But what we charge against the measures of the right honourable gentleman is this—that he has found a deficit and made a deficit, and has not proposed measures which will secure fair play to any experiment by which that deficit can be supplied. The whole speech of the right honourable gentleman depended on this position. If the position of the right honourable gentleman is not sound—as I hope I shall succeed in showing to the House—the whole of his conclusions fall to the ground. The House, I am sure, will generously remember, though the hour is late, that this is not an occasion on which I should shrink from representing the opinions of the party which I have the honour to represent. I will therefore consider, as briefly as I possibly can, and for the moment in a merely financial point of view, the plan of the right honourable gentleman, and I will see how it agrees with the position he has laid down, and how you can reconcile it with the character he has given of the motion of my honourable friend. Of this Budget of the right honourable gentleman I would say this—that it aims at too much and provides too little. The right honourable gentleman finds a deficit; he increases that deficit, and he closes his proposition with introducing a tax of a very extensive character and which is to exist only for a short term. The right honourable gentleman has, I think, estimated his deficiency at nearly nine millions and a half—9,400,000. When the right honourable gentleman made his financial statement the army estimates were not on the table—at least few gentlemen had enjoyed the opportunity of studying them; I, at least, had not been able to examine them. But I think no one can deny, who has looked over these estimates, that it would be a moderate calculation to estimate that the sums on account of the army expenditure

would not be less than a million beyond what appears in the estimates. We have heard to-night that regiments have been sent to China from the Indian establishment, and that the moment they arrive in China they will be on the British establishment. We have also heard to-night of regiments from India, which are expected in England, and which the moment they arrive will be on the British establishment. In the estimates we found one vote of half a million for the Chinese war, which everyone felt at the moment was a ludicrous amount.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer: You are not to suppose that the vote of credit represents the whole charge of the Chinese war. It only represents certain extraordinary charges which could not be stated in the ordinary estimates.

Mr. Disraeli: Certainly the sum of 500,000*l.* would appear at the first blush very unequal to the occasion. The estimate has already assumed the dimensions of 850,000*l.*

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was understood to dissent.

Mr. Disraeli: Without at this moment dwelling too much on the estimates, it would be a very sanguine anticipation on the part of the House to suppose that the deficit assumed by the right honourable gentleman would not be exceeded. The right honourable gentleman with this deficit of 9,400,000*l.* will next year find wanting those malt and hop credits for 1,400,000*l.*, of which we have heard so much, and against the appropriation of which I protest as a measure utterly unsound in finance, and of which I am quite surprised that the right honourable gentleman should ever have proposed to avail himself. I remember that in 1852 I proposed, as a measure of reform, the extinction of a very small office connected with the Treasury which had a comparatively small sum of public money intrusted to its administration—I believe, not more than 350,000*l.* I proposed that that sum should be taken in the revenue of the year, and I did so only in order to secure a surplus, so that the amount would probably have been found in the balances of the Exchequer. The right honourable gentleman denounced that project as one which could be justified on

no ground whatever, and called for the reprobation of Parliament upon it; but what he is now doing is just the same thing, only upon a much greater scale, and under circumstances much less justifiable. Then we have in addition the question of the million of Exchequer bonds. I understand that the country is in a position of unexampled prosperity. If we cannot pay our debts at such a time when can we? When I asked, the other night, the Secretary to the Treasury, in the absence of the right honourable gentleman, how and when he proposed to pay that million of Exchequer bonds, the reply I received was a courteous reminder that I had in 1858 postponed the payment of 2,000,000*l.* of Exchequer bonds. Surely he recollected the circumstances under which I took that step? That was not a time of unexampled prosperity. The country was still staggering under a great commercial panic. The week before Parliament met, in the beginning of the year, the minimum rate of discount was 10 per cent., and it was felt by everybody that it was totally impossible under those circumstances to propose taxes which would press especially on the commercial classes, then suffering from such startling and fatal depression. The proposition I made was unanimously adopted by the House, and no one under the circumstances raised the slightest protest against it; but I see no similarity between the circumstances of that year and those of this year of unrivalled prosperity with which we are now dealing.

What we object to in the scheme of the Chancellor of the Exchequer is that it does not resemble the transactions of 1842 or of 1845. It does not resemble the operations of Sir Robert Peel, or even those operations of 1853 which he himself introduced in this House. It is because the right honourable gentleman has neglected to take that security, because we find his plan is improvident, and consequently, under the circumstances, extremely dangerous, that we ask the House to interpose and express its opinion upon the propositions submitted to them. What will be our situation a year hence? It may not under ordinary circumstances be discreet to indulge in very prospective finance; but it appears to me it would be perfect madness, in our present situation, not to contemplate

what will be our position in 1861. The right honourable member for Portsmouth (Sir F. Baring), who has some experience on such subjects, has calculated the amount of deficit. I confess I shall be surprised, I need hardly say pleased, to find it does not exceed that amount; but if the possible deficit in 1861 be merely 12,000,000*l.*, surely the House should pause before it sanctions the proposition of the right honourable gentleman and should hesitate, with such a prospect in view, before it accedes to measures which must necessarily, according to the right honourable gentleman's own account, increase the deficit and augment the pressure of 1861. The right honourable gentleman seems to be disappointed that more than one speaker in this debate has contemplated the dangerous and inevitable consequences, in such a state of affairs, of attempting to fasten the expenditure of the country upon direct taxation; and he has brought forward a paper to show how, in all recent impositions of taxation, there has not been that fair proportion between direct and indirect taxation imposed which he believes is just and highly politic. But there is this fallacy in the paper which the right honourable gentleman read, and the inferences which he draws from it. We do not object to a fair proportion of direct taxation in our financial system. What we do object to is that direct taxation should take the form of an income-tax on this large scale. It is not fair in the right honourable gentleman always to state the question as one of competition between direct and indirect taxation, and describe this side of the House as being always the advocates of the indirect against the direct system. The question is not as to which system is superior. There are but few in this House who contemplate a time when a considerable amount of indirect taxation must not form a part of our financial system. But the question is whether that form of direct taxation, which no one has denounced in more unsparing terms than the right honourable gentleman, the national evils of which he has proclaimed, the demoralising influence of which on the people he has described in glowing terms, shall continue to exist, and not only exist, but be increased under his administration, and go on increasing in a ratio that none can contemplate without appre-



hension. That is the question. More than one honourable gentleman has addressed us in this way. We are told we are advocating the interests of a class, and that we do not consider sufficiently the interests of the masses that we now learn from the Chancellor of the Exchequer will probably elect the new Parliament. I deny the justice of this observation.

There is a class of political philosophers, certainly represented in the present House of Commons, who think that they will elevate a nation by degrading it into a mob. I do not share this opinion. The contributors to the income-tax are of various classes in the State, numerous, of very different degrees of wealth, cultivation, and position. Those paying the income-tax are, generally speaking, the flower of the nation. They represent the traditions, the experience, the domestic integrity, and the moral qualities of the nation; and it is to their high spirit and constancy, from the highest to the humblest, that the State must look in the hour of exigency. It is not true that the contributors to the income-tax are a class apart from the great body of the nation; though divided into many degrees, they are a portion of that great body. I will not go into the subject of the comparative pressure of taxation, or inquire whether those who fall under the imposition of the income-tax do not suffer more severely than any of the working classes of this country. I acknowledge how important it is to consider the condition of the working classes; I know how much depends on their ample and remunerative employment; I know how they contribute to the wealth of the country; their condition ought, by all means, to be elevated and improved. And I know that you cannot accomplish such a result better than by extending the commercial relations of this country with others, and putting an end to those remaining imposts that press on trade and industry. All these are high objects of policy that the vast majority of this House are prepared by great efforts to accomplish. But you can accomplish this result on certain conditions only—namely, that they are practicable and consistent with our financial position. And we cannot decide on what is our financial position without, in some degree, considering the future. I now wish to say a

word on this commercial treaty with France. I entirely approve any means that will increase our commercial relations with that country. That has been for many years the object of constant solicitude on the part of many successive Governments. In 1840 we were informed that a commercial treaty with France was being negotiated. I am not aware why that treaty was not ratified, but I believe that the difficulty did not come from the French Government. I should not have alluded to the subject if it had not been mentioned by a member of the cabinet, nor should I have felt at liberty to state what I am about to say but for what has fallen to-night from a servant of the Crown.

Sir, in 1852, when I was Chancellor of the Exchequer, I was not in office a month before I made an attempt to establish increased commercial relations with France. When the Secretary of State (Lord Malmesbury) had opened the more formal business of the negotiation he requested me to place myself in communication with Lord Cowley, and to enter into correspondence with him on the subject, which I did. I do not say that the result of our labours would have taken the form of a treaty. Perhaps the alterations would not have been so extensive as these, but at any rate they would not have been of a despicable character in a commercial point of view, and they would have been arranged by the mutual operation of our respective tariffs. What was it that unfortunately prevented those arrangements? Towards the end of the autumn circumstances arose that rendered it our duty when Parliament assembled to propose a great increase of our armaments. I found it impossible to have a peace Budget and a war expenditure. I was the victim, and my Budget never recovered that fatal blow. I mention this to show that we have none of those prejudices which the right honourable gentleman imputes to us against increasing our commercial relations with the French Government. On the contrary, I think there is nothing more desirable than that those relations should be enlarged, and even if they took the form of a treaty I think I could endure it. What I do object to in this treaty is that, irrespective of the financial considerations involved, it is a very bad treaty.

I do not think there ever was a treaty drawn up apparently with less forethought or less knowledge of the circumstances with which the negotiators had to deal, which altogether contains so many arrangements injurious, not only to the trade of England, but also to that of France, or which is better calculated to sow the seeds of discord and dissension between the two countries. It would not be convenient now, at this hour of one o'clock, to go into details of the treaty, which would of itself require rather an elaborate speech; but I think that famous clause relating to coal, for example, is a very great mistake, and, if it is acceded to, ought to be accompanied by a reciprocal engagement on the part of France that all corn coming to this country ought to be exported free of duty. Then the arrangement about silk in the treaty is extremely imperfect. Our arrangement in regard to silk was that it should enter France at a duty of 15 per cent., while it is now charged 30 per cent. It is a great error that France should be permitted by this treaty to levy an export duty on raw silk, when our manufactured articles of silk are to be subject to a duty of 30 per cent.

There are many other details, some of which are important, but which I will not weary the House with at this hour. I object, however, to the treaty as an ill-drawn treaty, and one which ought not to be allowed to pass without criticism and some opposition. But what I object to is, that by entering on this treaty the Government have increased that deficiency of the revenue under which the right honourable gentleman is suffering. I will say this of the treaty, that it adds certainly to our deficit a sum of 1,200,000*l.* immediately, but it is so drawn that in respect to wine, when the right honourable gentleman brings his new duties into full operation, his tests, I feel persuaded, will desert him. I do not understand how he will put his machinery into such order that his wines can be entered without a much greater sacrifice of revenue than he contemplates. If that be so, his loss will be much more considerable, and will be 500,000*l.* more than he contemplated in the statement he made when he opened his Budget to the House. As regards commercial intercourse with France, there

is on this side of the House no practical opposition to such a course, but, on the contrary, the greatest readiness to enter into arrangements for that object. But we object to the treaty as a treaty not skilfully negotiated, and as one that occasions a considerable deficiency in our revenue, probably a much more considerable deficiency than the Chancellor of the Exchequer estimates. We object also to the time at which it is brought forward, because the Chancellor of the Exchequer himself has confessed that the French Government were prepared to postpone the treaty till 1861. There were secret negotiations, and there is not the slightest reason why the treaty should not have been ratified, and become a secret treaty, till it was carried into operation. But we must consider the Budget of this year combined with the Budget of 1853, for this is a complement of that Budget, and they are inseparably united. What has been the effect of the financial proposition of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1853, and cannot we draw some warning from its fate as to the probable result of the financial arrangements of 1860? There are four great features of the financial scheme of 1853—that famous scheme the praises of which have been so much celebrated, and on the credit of which the Chancellor of the Exchequer flourished till he made his financial statement for 1860.

The first feature of that celebrated Budget was, I will not say to pay off the national debt, but to reduce the interest paid to public creditors. We afterwards had the somewhat ambiguous apology from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that when he embarked in that enterprise he was not aware that it was necessary to give a notice of six months to the holders of 500,000,000*l.* of stock before they could be paid off—a circumstance which, of course, interfered with the operation. I may say, in passing, what is perhaps not known to the House, that that part of the scheme of 1853 cost us the whole of the balances in the Exchequer, and when we entered on the Russian war our balance in the Treasury was little more than 1,000,000*l.* The second feature of that financial scheme was the reduction of the tea-duties to 1*s.* a pound. I may say, in passing, that that was a measure which had been adopted by

his predecessor. I had the honour to propose that the tea-duties should be reduced to 1s. a pound; and had the proposition then been carried into law, a duty of 1s. only would now have been paid. The right honourable gentleman adopted generally the plan I proposed, but with his eager mind he proposed what he thought a more methodical arrangement. He wished to do it quicker than I suggested; and what has been the result? The duty on tea is not 1s. a pound; it is much more; and I observed, from what passed at a meeting of the tea trade the other day, that the Chancellor of the Exchequer received a suggestion from the gentlemen present that the duty at the present exigency should be made one penny a pound more.

On the third article of the Budget of 1853—the Succession Tax—I need hardly say anything, though the consequence of it does affect us; but let me recall to the House the mode in which that tax was recommended to our notice, and the estimate of its produce that was made. This is the great measure which gained for the right honourable gentleman the sympathy of the honourable member for Birmingham. Here was a tax directed against the landed interest—a circumstance which recommended it very much to that honourable gentleman's favour, and which in 1860 was to produce two millions of money. The Chancellor of the Exchequer told us then that with those 2,000,000*l.* and the 2,000,000*l.* which we should acquire by the falling in of the terminable annuities we should have a pretty good sum in hand to assist us in putting an end to the income-tax. Well, the year 1860 arrived, in which this succession-duty was to produce 2,000,000*l.* per annum, and the result, we find, is that it actually produced about one-half that sum. This was the third great measure of the Budget of 1853, and the third great failure.

The fourth great measure, and one much larger in its proportions, is now under the consideration of the House—that which relates to the income-tax, which, in a manner that gained for him the applause of all parties and the assent of a grateful country, he told us was at the commencement of 1860 to terminate altogether. Yet, notwithstanding that promise,

we find that the income-tax of 1853 is, unfortunately, still alive; nay, more, that it is a child which has greatly grown. The income-tax of 1853, in short, which year after year was to diminish, and which in the present year was entirely to cease, has now increased to 4 per cent., or at the rate of 10*d.* in the pound. This, Sir, was the fourth great feature of the famous Budget of 1853, and the fourth great failure. Such, then, was the scheme of the right honourable gentleman, and it is in consequence of that great financial measure that we are asked to place confidence in the wild and improvident propositions to which our assent is now invited. But I will not state the case unfairly to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He has reminded the House that causes have intervened to prevent the realisation of calculations which no one could control, and to those causes it is that he attributes the failure of his arrangements. The Russian war broke out contrary to his expectation. Now, before I touch briefly on that war, let me remind the right honourable gentleman that the plea put forward because of it has no validity whatever, so far as regards his attempts to account for not keeping his engagement with respect to the termination of the income-tax. Did he not, let me ask, ratify and renew those engagements in 1857, when he criticised the Budget of the right honourable baronet the member for Radnor (Sir G. C. Lewis), long, be it recollected, after peace had been proclaimed? Why, Sir, the right honourable gentleman was then the apostle of the same policy as in 1853, and, so far as speeches can bind him, he must admit that he recommended the same policy and contemplated the same results. Nay, more; at a still more recent period, when I in 1858 occupied the position which he now holds, when by course of law the income-tax was to have lapsed to 5*d.*—half its proposed amount—he (the Chancellor of the Exchequer), still faithful to his old views, sanctioned the measure which I proposed,<sup>1</sup> and bound himself to the accomplishment of the same results to which in 1853 he stood pledged. But now what, let me ask, is the plea which he puts forward for the abandonment of the policy to which I have referred? We now, instead of witnessing the termination of the income-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Speech on Budget of 1858, p. 444.

tax, are called upon to assent, not only to its great increase, but to sanction an arrangement by which, in all probability, another appeal in the same shape will next year be rendered necessary, and we shall be asked to continue this tax in a still more odious form.

The right honourable gentleman, however, tells us that to the Russian war we are to attribute the utter failure of the Budget of 1853; but let me remind the House, in dealing with that plea, that we now know much more with respect to that war than we did seven years ago. We have had since laid on this table secret correspondence<sup>1</sup> which took place between Her Majesty's Minister at St. Petersburg and the members of the present Government, the noble lord opposite then, as at present, being Secretary for Foreign Affairs. That correspondence was laid on the table in the spring of 1854. From the circumstance of my receiving authentic information which led me to infer its existence, the noble lord was obliged ultimately to produce it. What appeared by that correspondence? Why, this—that no sooner had Lord Derby's Government been expelled from office than the Emperor of Russia disclosed to their successors his designs on Turkey. Am I using an exaggerated phrase in saying that immediately Lord Derby's Government left office this disclosure was made? I have a very good witness, formerly a great commercial authority, now a great diplomatic one, the secret negotiator at Paris—Mr. Cobden. I saw him rise in this House, and heard him say that there never was a vote in his life he regretted more having given than the one which expelled Lord Derby from office in 1852, because, he said, 'I have not the slightest doubt, from the information I possess, that that vote produced the Russian war.' On January 1, the despatch was dated which informed Her Majesty's ministers that it was the intention of the Emperor of Russia to invade Turkey. The Menschikoff mission, which honourable gentlemen recollect, followed in due course, and yet it was with all this knowledge—the right honourable gentleman, with his eager nature, was not so absorbed in his office that he had not an acquaintance

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.* with Sir Hamilton Seymour, relating the Czar's proposal for partition of Turkey.

with public affairs generally—that he brought forward his famous Budget of 1853, with all those arrangements which only a state of continuous peace could justify. He held out to a Parliament which had repudiated the income-tax, which had insisted that it should be referred to a select committee, this mode as the satisfactory one of settling those long differences, while the right honourable gentleman must have been aware that Europe was on the eve of a great convulsion, and of a war into which England would not be inferentially and indirectly drawn, but one in which she must have been the prime actor, for her interests were about to be assailed. But is that all? We know that the Emperor of Russia acted with great hesitation, with great doubt and perplexity, watching with keenness the conduct and temper of the British Government; and if it had appeared to possess any real decision, would he not have been arrested in his fatal course? But we know from the personal confessions of that Government itself, that their cabinet was the scene of internal dissension—we know that there were two parties in it, and if the present Prime Minister had been Prime Minister then, the war would not have taken place.<sup>1</sup> There was a party over which Lord Aberdeen presided, which exercised an influence greater than that of the present Premier and the Foreign Secretary: and that was the party that produced peace Budgets when they ought to have been preparing war armaments. And what was the consequence? Has the House forgotten? England, I am sure, has not forgotten that famous vote in 1854, in Supply, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer—determined, forced, at last to take a new course, which would arrest that of the Emperor, and show him that England was not to be trifled with—proposed that two battalions should be sent to Malta, and proposed also the vote that should pay for their passage back.<sup>2</sup> Who can be surprised at what took place? Three months after such feeble conduct on the part of the Government the war was begun; and what were the consequences of that war? An addition to your debt

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Life of Lord Palmerston*, by Mr. Evelyn Ashley, vol. ii. chaps. 3 and 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. vol. ii. Speech on Prosecution of the War.



of 40,000,000*l.*—an annual charge of 1,180,000*l.*, exactly the sum you are going to pay annually for the French treaty of commerce. And now we are told we know nothing; but we have great and successful financiers—the statesmen who produced the great Budgets of 1853 and 1860—men who think only of the incidence of taxation on the working classes—who shrink from expenditure, who call for retrenchment, who make every possible effort to lighten the burden of taxation on the people. Why, if these great statesmen had only shown a little more foresight and firmness, and prevented that Russian war which they precipitated by their feebleness, the incidence of taxation would have been very considerably lightened; and does not this prove that other qualities than mere political economy are necessary for the government of a nation?

I told you that this Budget of 1853 was inseparably connected with that of 1860. You see how completely the Budget of 1853 has failed in all its four features. You see why it failed—because external circumstances, that were not foreseen by one who ought to have been prescient, interfered in a great degree with their consummation. What is the state of affairs now? Is the aspect more serene than it was in the spring of 1853? No man can suppose that the right honourable gentleman is ignorant of the state of external politics. If the Budget of 1860 ends in that confusion which I believe awaits it, and must await all schemes so utterly improvident, the right honourable gentleman will not be able to tell us next year that his plans have been frustrated by external causes which he could not foresee. The right honourable gentleman takes a great interest in the affairs of Italy. He has quarrelled with his old friend the Pope, and with many of his old friends. He is willing to extend that Christian charity he grudged me a share of the other night to the Greek Church. But I think it would be well for this House, when we have a scheme of finance of this improvident description placed before us—when, with a deficit existing, a further deficiency is created, and that tax increased which in the moment of emergency should be the source on which we ought most to rely, I think it would be

well for us to consider what is the state of our foreign affairs, and what is really contained under that phrase which so glibly runs through the mouths of men—the Italian question.

Sir, the affairs of Italy at this moment involve the greatest causes which could possibly impel men to action, or which could influence the destinies of empires. Totally irrespective of many causes of comparative insignificance, all of which have in old days produced war, you have in Italy now three matters alone, any one of which is enough to convulse the world. You have the question of Papal supremacy; you have the question of the natural boundaries of empires; you have the question of the nationality of races: each of the first two have before this time produced the longest and most sanguinary struggle in the memory of man. The question of Papal supremacy gave you once the thirty years' war. The question of the natural boundaries of empires gave you the long war of the French Revolution. Those questions are still in existence; and, in addition, you have a new one, the solution of which cannot be ultimately avoided, perhaps cannot be long delayed—the question of the nationality of races. Are we to be told, in such circumstances as these, that all a statesman should do is to simplify the tariff? Was there ever a moment in the history of this country when we ought more to husband our resources? Is this a time wantonly to put an end to the sources of your ordinary revenue? Is this the time you should fix upon to anticipate the resources of your direct taxation? There is not a man out of this House, if there be any man in it, who doubts the propriety of the course we ought to pursue. I think the course recommended by the Government is the most improvident—I could use, but I will not, a much stronger phrase—that ever yet was counselled to Parliament. I should, under ordinary circumstances, hesitate to support it; but in a moment like this I feel it my duty utterly and emphatically to protest against it. The honourable member for Liskeard spoke with great friendship to me this evening, and told me aloud, though of course in confidence, that I had recommended a very unwise course to my honourable friend the member for Essex in advising him to propose that motion, which he introduced with so much spirit

and promise. The honourable member for Liskeard asked why we proposed such a resolution, why we did not admit the principle of the Budget—that is to say, the principle of the policy—and worry the Government in committee. We should then have got a great deal of assistance; the honourable member would have helped us himself; and we might have beaten the Government on the details. I have no doubt the honourable member would make a much more adroit leader of a party than I can pretend to be, and, indeed, it is only with the assistance and constant indulgence of my friends that I can for a moment undertake the cares and duties of the post I now occupy. But I must tell the honourable member for Liskeard he has totally mistaken the motives which influence us on this occasion, and which are totally different from those which would regulate his conduct. The Chancellor of the Exchequer seemed to deride the speech of the right honourable member for the University of Cambridge<sup>1</sup>—a speech inspired, I believe, by as true a sense of patriotism and characterised by as pure and noble an eloquence as any speech ever made in this House. The Chancellor of the Exchequer seemed to deride the possibility that we had any object in the course we had taken but to embarrass and subvert the Government. ‘If those are your views of finance and policy,’ said the right honourable gentleman, ‘it is your duty to terminate our ministerial career, and if you are not prepared to do that you ought not wantonly to embarrass us.’ This was the argument he used. But, Sir, I remember the Parliament I am now addressing. I remember it is a Parliament summoned by the Queen under the advice of counsellors of whom I formed one myself, and that Parliament on its meeting, though by a very narrow majority, declared that they had no confidence in the then Government of her Majesty. They had no confidence in our foreign policy. They had no confidence in our reform principles. What confidence the present Parliament has in the foreign policy of the present Government I will not pretend to decide. All I know is that, so far as I can form an opinion, the affairs of Italy are in exactly the same position as when Parliament was prorogued in August last.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Walpole.

So far as the Reform Bill is concerned, I confess, after the announcement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer that the franchise is to be given to the masses, I admit that no Reform Bill we could bring forward could vie with the coming measure of the Government. But I think I have a right under these circumstances to say that neither I nor my colleagues, after that vote, are at all anxious to attempt to reoccupy the places we then filled. I may, at least, say for myself that, having for more than two years led this house in a minority, I shrink from the unparalleled anxiety and responsibility of such a post ; and I would recommend no gentleman ever to accept that position who has any regard for his nervous system. The important office which the Chancellor of the Exchequer fills gives ample opportunity to his eager mind and his impetuous rhetoric. Perhaps in moments of solitary aspiration he has wished to occupy the proud post of leader of the House of Commons, which no one could fill more efficiently. But from what I have observed of the right hon. gentleman's temperament, I think I may tell him that it is well for him, however eminent his position, that he reposes at least for a time beneath the *mitis sapientia* of the noble lord the Foreign Secretary and the calm patience of the noble Premier. Although, however, we are neither anxious, nor, perhaps, able, to disturb you in your seats, are we to forget our duties as members of this house? Are we to forget that there is such a thing as the English nation, and that there is such a thing to fulfil as public duty? No, Sir! We are conscious of that duty. We will not enter into combinations and cabals to embarrass the Government. I have heard in this debate a great deal of what are called party questions, and there is nothing upon which there appears to me such confusion in the minds of men, and, of all men in the world, in the minds of members of Parliament, as upon this subject. Sir, when a great political party chooses on some technical ground and narrow issue to join with a section of their opponents and upset a Government, their conduct may be liable to great public reproach. I say 'may be liable,' because even in such a case combination might be an act of duty, if they thought that the general conduct of the Government was pernicious.

cious and they had the means and opportunity of rectifying it. But when a great party, on a question of policy, financial, commercial, and diplomatic, come forward to assert distinct principles, and to advocate an intelligible course, which none can misapprehend, and with which I believe a great portion of the nation sympathises, to hold up such a party movement as liable to reproach is to confound the nature of things, and not to comprehend the scope and spirit of our Constitution. It is the duty, the noblest duty that can fall to members of this House, to fulfil such a task. It must always be the lot of only the minority to be Ministers of State, but it is the privilege of all to have views upon political affairs, to support those views with eloquence in this House if they desire it and have the gifts, but, at all events, in honourable combination with those with whom they have community of sentiment to assert with their votes their influence and their opinions.

Sir, such is now the course which we are about to take. It is our opinion that the proposition of the Government is one pernicious, and improvident in finance, not to say profligate—one that may lead this country to an extremity of circumstances this time next year which few can contemplate without the utmost alarm. I wish to see such a course arrested. I do not know what prolonged discussions in this House may not effect. I have no hope or supposition that by asserting our policy in this straightforward manner we can accomplish that object at present. But, in affirming the resolution of my hon. friend the member for Essex, which declares that to add to a deficiency in finance is a proceeding to be deprecated, and that we ought not to disappoint the just expectations of the country by largely increasing the income-tax, we assert a principle which we believe in and will maintain. Those just expectations I myself will not deceive, and to the country I ultimately appeal.

## WAYS AND MEANS, April 7, 1862.

[By this time the condition of the revenue had begun to excite very serious uneasiness in the House of Commons generally. It was thought that the reduction of taxes and the increase of estimates could not very well go on together. The financial policy of Mr. Gladstone and the military and naval policy of Lord Palmerston, sanctioned, however, by the country, must, if carried on side by side, land the nation in some great monetary calamity. On Monday April 7, Mr. Disraeli delivered the speech given below, which was effectively supported by Sir Stafford Northcote: and in the following June the subject was revived by Mr. Stansfeld and Mr. Walpole, when a memorable scene ensued.]

**M**R. DISRAELI rose and said,—Before you leave the chair, Sir, I wish to make a few observations upon our financial position, which I think is not altogether free from anxiety. I am the more disposed to take this course, because, from what I hear and what I observe, it seems that there is considerable misconception in the public mind upon a subject on which, of all others, the people of this country should entertain accurate notions. We are, according to the statement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, about to commence the year without a surplus. Under any circumstances this is not a gratifying or satisfactory position. No doubt, however, there are circumstances in which a Minister of Finance might be justified in recommending such a course to Parliament for its acceptance and sanction. If it were his lot, for example, by a considerable remission of taxation to stimulate the industry and enterprise of the country; if our trade were flourishing, if our revenue were rising, if we had every security for internal peace and external tranquillity, I can conceive that a Chancellor of the Exchequer might feel himself justified in introducing a programme of finance for the year from which the important

feature of a surplus should be wanting. Unhappily, I think that is not the position of this country at the present time. Our trade is not increasing; it is, unfortunately, diminishing. Our revenue is not rising; it is, unhappily, declining. The Chancellor of the Exchequer himself alluded in the course of his statement to circumstances which may diminish the means for the employment of our people, and although their conduct in a very trying period has justly elicited the approbation and sympathy of all right-minded men, still if there is a great diminution in the means of their employment; that fact cannot be regarded as an additional guarantee for domestic tranquillity. On the other hand, if we look abroad, if we look either to the American or to the European continent, no one, however disinclined to indulge in a gloomy view of the future, can for a moment assert that the prospect is of an encouraging character. Upon the state of America it is unnecessary for me to make a single observation. It occupies all minds, and has already been amply touched upon. But, with respect to the European continent, although for the moment there is perfect quietude, no one can shut his eyes to the fact that of all the difficulties which occasioned a recent war, as well as of all those which have since come into operation, not one has yet received a solution. Under these circumstances it is much to be regretted that the state of our finances is such that we commence our financial year avowedly with only a nominal surplus.

It is impossible, I think, to evade this question—why is there not a surplus? That is a question which everybody, both in and out of this House, is asking himself at the present time. The Chancellor of the Exchequer in his speech the other night informed us that he had contemplated that during last year there would be a loss by the repeal of the paper-duty to the amount of 665,000*l.* He went on to say that his estimate, like other estimates, was erroneous, and that the loss last year from the repeal of the paper-duty was 865,000*l.* In 1860–61 there was a deficit of 2,558,000*l.* Last year there was a deficit of 1,164,000*l.* It is quite obvious that if we deduct 800,000*l.* from 1,164,000*l.*, there would only be a deficiency in round numbers of 300,000*l.* on the year just closed. But what

would have been our position if the paper-duty had not been repealed, as regards a surplus in the present year? In the financial year just commenced there will be a total loss under the head of the paper-duties alone of 1,300,000*l.*, and to this, if we add the very trifling, but in our present position not utterly contemptible, surplus, to which the Chancellor of the Exchequer confessed the other night, we should have had a surplus in the Budget of this year of about 1,400,000*l.*—a safe and comfortable surplus—but under the circumstances of the country, with a declining trade, with a diminishing revenue, with a possibility of critical occasions both on the American and European continents—a surplus not a single pound sterling too great to be maintained. Now, Sir, when the repeal of the paper-duties was first suggested by the Chancellor of the Exchequer it was opposed upon two main grounds. There were some who, when a surplus was announced by the Minister of Finance, did not think themselves justified in impugning the accuracy of his calculations, unless they were prepared to bring forward a motion which would have been substantially a motion of want of confidence in the Government; and, Sir, those gentlemen, among whom I may count myself, having to deal with a surplus, proposed that, instead of repealing a tax, the Chancellor of the Exchequer should only reduce a tax, so that no permanent branch of the revenue should be abolished. Besides those who took that position in the discussions which then occurred I must do justice to honourable gentlemen who opposed the repeal of the paper-duties on perfectly distinct grounds. They opposed the repeal of the paper-duties because they contested the existence of a surplus. Night after night the honourable member for Norfolk <sup>1</sup> brought that view of the question before the House; night after night, to his credit be it spoken, he insisted that in the then state of affairs in America it was more than probable some critical circumstances might arise that would occasion an increase in our military and naval expenditure.

Now, how were those representations, urged with such frequency by the honourable member for Norfolk, treated by Her

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bentinck.



Majesty's Government? First with indifference, and, I regret to say—I speak from my impressions—ultimately with derision. The suggestion was scoffed at. The result is that critical circumstances connected with the civil war in America led to an increased expenditure naval and military, which has exceeded in amount the sum we lost by the repeal of the paper-duties. It was also denied that the estimates the right honourable gentleman announced he had made of the receipts of the China money were perfectly fallacious. It was my honourable friend the member for Horsham (Mr. Seymour Fitzgerald) who brought forward that subject, and he did so with the utmost precision of statement and argument. The Chancellor of the Exchequer had made an estimate that he would receive from China 750,000*l.* The member for Horsham proved by acute argument and by statements founded apparently on authentic facts that the Chancellor of the Exchequer would not receive more than half of that amount. What has been the result? Instead of 750,000*l.*, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received less than 400,000*l.* And how was the statement of the honourable member for Horsham received? Why, the Chancellor of the Exchequer absolutely carried that estimate of 750,000*l.*, I may say almost on his personal guarantee. It was said, if a Chancellor of the Exchequer in an estimate of that kind is not to be relied upon, if it is supposed that he can deceive the House, it is vain to hope he can carry on the affairs of the country. It was felt that was not a question on which anyone could place his opinion in opposition to that of the Minister of Finance, and 750,000*l.* was received as an authentic calculation. I ask again what has been the result? The result has been a mistake of about 400,000*l.* in that estimate; and therefore, Sir, I think we may fairly conclude the objections which were urged against the proposal of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to repeal the paper-duties, on his own showing, have been fully justified by the event; and I give the credit which is due to the honourable member for Norfolk and the honourable member for Horsham for the prescience which they exhibited and the pertinacity with which they placed their views before the country.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer the other night thought the occasion apt for a general review of his financial career, and I would follow him with great brevity. Sir, it is but due to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to admit that for the financial operations of 1859-60 he is but partially, and, I would even say, not at all, responsible. That year, ending with a surplus, does not at all influence, and did not at all occasion, the peculiar and perilous position in which the country now finds itself. Therefore, I will take, not the three years, but the two years in which the Chancellor of the Exchequer, unrestricted and uncontrolled, has had the great opportunity of bringing forward the whole of his financial schemes, and has been allowed, by an indulgent and admiring House of Commons, to steer the financial vessel—I will not say into port or into the shallows, but—into the position in which it now finds itself. Well, those two years have had some remarkable characteristics. The year 1861-62, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer informed us a few nights ago, has terminated with a deficiency of 1,164,000*l.* The preceding year, 1860-61, terminated with a deficiency of 2,558,000*l.* There have been excesses of expenditure since ascertained to the amount of 278,000*l.*; and the deficiencies of those two years—of the period during which the right honourable gentleman has been perfectly master of the situation, and has not been hampered by any arrangements of his predecessors, or by the engagements of those who went before him—those two years have resulted in a united deficit of four millions sterling. I mention this, among other reasons, for this one in particular—that the House should understand the cost of luxuries. The French Treaty was an admirable performance. No one is against French treaties of commerce, if it be the right time at which we should enter into them. Many ministers, before the Chancellor of the Exchequer, have either carried or attempted to carry such treaties. But still, understand that the year of the French Treaty passing resulted in a deficiency of 2,558,000*l.*, and the year of the repeal of the paper-duty—another equally popular arrangement—resulted in a deficiency of 1,164,000*l.* So that, as I have already mentioned, there has accrued from the management of the finances

by the right honourable gentleman during the two years in which he has been unchecked and uncontrolled, and has given full play to that imagination which has dealt with the resources of the country in so brilliant a manner, a deficiency of 4,000,000*l.*

But is that all? Alas! it is only a small portion of the achievements of the right honourable gentleman. In addition to this deficit of 4,000,000*l.*, the right honourable gentleman during these two years has anticipated the resources of the country to the extent of 3,500,000*l.*—something more than 1,200,000*l.* upon the malt-credit, and 2,000,000*l.* anticipated upon the income-tax. Well, Sir, with one-half of the Spanish payment—for only one-half of that payment has been enjoyed by the right honourable gentleman during those two years—the House will perceive that those sums made up the amount of 3,500,000*l.* Therefore this great minister of our finances has in the course of two years expended more than the ordinary revenue of the country gave him—indeed, has exceeded the ordinary revenue of the country by no less than 7,500,000*l.* But is that all? What was the ordinary revenue of the country during those two years when its amount was exceeded by the right honourable gentleman by the enormous sum of 7,500,000*l.*? It was an ordinary revenue sustained and supported by war taxation—by a war income-tax, by war duties upon tea and upon sugar. And yet, swollen and bloated as the ordinary revenue of the country was by these war taxes, it was exceeded by the right honourable gentleman during those two years by the sum of 7,500,000*l.* But is that all? It seems impossible that there can be any aggravation of such aggravated circumstances. And yet I can show the House that hitherto they have not measured the amount of the prodigality of the right honourable gentleman; for not only has he exceeded during two years the ordinary revenue of the country by 7,500,000*l.*, that revenue being sustained by war taxation, but he has done this at a period when the charges for the National Debt had diminished to the extent of 2,000,000*l.* by the lapse of terminable annuities.

Now, Sir, I think the House will agree that I have said

before them a very serious state of affairs—the immense excess of expenditure, the actual deficit, the exhaustion of all sources of extraordinary revenue, and that at a period when the political horizon abroad and at home is certainly not unclouded. But the House will be curious to know—for, in the blaze of rhetoric in which the annual communication of our financial state is made, we lose sight of that necessary information which, after all, ought to guide our opinions—the House will like to be reminded how this deficit has been supplied. We clearly understand how the 3,500,000*l.* of anticipated revenue has been obtained; but how has the deficit been supplied? It has been supplied by the Chancellor of the Exchequer drawing reckless draughts to the amount of 2,664,000*l.* upon the balances in the Exchequer, which were not even then strong. It has been supplied by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for two consecutive years, stopping in Hounslow fashion repayments of money into the Exchequer, and those repayments thus stopped in the two years amount to 881,000*l.*, being repayments of loans which have been raised by the country. For example, there was the Irish loan some years ago, of which repayments are still going on. The deficit has been further supplied by a positive increase of the debt to certainly no less an amount than 461,000*l.* If we add together the draughts upon the balances, 2,684,000*l.*, the application of repayments, 881,000*l.*, and the creation of new debt, 461,000*l.*, the House will find that they make the sum of 4,026,000*l.*, and they will at once perceive that that is the sum which has provided for the deficit. I ought, perhaps, to remind the House that the balances in the Exchequer in March 1860 were 7,972,000*l.*; in March 1862 they were 5,288,000*l.*; and the difference, 2,684,000*l.*, is the sum which the Chancellor of the Exchequer has drawn out by his draughts upon those balances.

The House will admit that this is a very critical position for our finances to be in, and it is interesting to observe in what manner the Chancellor of the Exchequer encourages us under the inevitable announcement which it was his duty to make on Thursday week. All that the arts of rhetoric could supply to soften facts, to confuse figures, and ingeniously to

bewilder the House, were no doubt had recourse to, but so happy and adroit was the manner of the Chancellor of the Exchequer that, although the announcement was not made in so harsh and crude a shape as it is now communicated to the House, still sufficient was known in some degree to prepare the minds of the public for the intelligence which could account for such portentous results as a deficit in two years of 4,000,000*l.*—the appropriation, or rather misappropriation, of 3,500,000*l.* of anticipated resources; and all that at a period when trade and revenue are both declining, and when, according to the minister himself, the aspect of affairs at home and abroad is of the least encouraging character. How does the right honourable gentleman account for, vindicate, extenuate, these tremendous results? First, we are told that these two years during which our finances have been managed in this satisfactory manner were exceptional years. I deny that they were exceptional years. What were the exceptional circumstances? The Chancellor of the Exchequer has told us. There was the war with China. Is that an exceptional circumstance? I have had the honour of sitting for a quarter of a century in this House, and I do not think I can recall two consecutive sessions in which Parliament has not had to deal with circumstances as exceptional as the war with China. I came in with the Canadian insurrection, which cost something. We are now dealing with a Canadian invasion, the cost of which every gentleman knows. There have been in that period three Chinese wars, two Kaffir wars, a Persian war, and, I think, two New Zealand wars. There has been a Syrian invasion, which cost something, and an Irish famine which cost a great deal, although no one begrudges that expenditure. Under these circumstances, is any minister justified in stating the China war as an exceptional circumstance, and ought he not in his calculations to anticipate that some occurrence of an analogous character may happen in the course of the year?

‘But,’ says the right honourable gentleman, ‘never mind. The cost has been large; some of you may think the management has been loose; but although I have not a stick or a stiver left,’—for he told us that—‘although I have managed I

your resources so as to create the greatest deficit that ever was made in a like period, still there is this consolation for you—I have reduced the amount of the National Debt by 4,000,000*l*.' I deny the alleged reduction of 4,000,000*l*. I deny that he has reduced the amount of the National Debt at all. Instead of a diminution of the public debt, there has absolutely been an increase during the financial administration of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. But we have a third source of consolation in the terrible scrapes in which we so unexpectedly find ourselves. 'Exceptional circumstances' is an abstraction, and we may pass it by. 'The reduction of the debt' was a more material assertion, and does not bear criticism. But there was something not so abstract as 'exceptional circumstances,' and not quite so easily grappled within a material sense as 'reduction of the debt,' yet still bearing a delightful and popular title; and beneath this cloud the Chancellor of the Exchequer, like other heroes, covers himself in a position of great peril. At the announcement that the epoch of retrenchment has commenced I observed that gentlemen below the gangway pricked up their ears immediately. 'The epoch of retrenchment has commenced!' Well, that is a most encouraging circumstance. Never mind past disaster, never mind deficits and mortgages. If we are really to have an inauguration of the epoch of retrenchment, we will soon make up leeway, and depend upon it we may enjoy all the advantages which have accrued to us, and still put our finances in a solid position. But, Sir, I confess that I was extremely perplexed to know how this retrenchment was to be effected. The right honourable gentleman was inaugurating the epoch of retrenchment, and what is his statement? He compares the estimates of the present year with the expenditure of the last, and he says the expenditure of last year exceeds the estimates of the present year by 1,700,000*l*. I say that it is moonshine to do this. If I am referred to the expenditure of last year, let me have the expenditure of this year. The right honourable gentleman seems to say that I am not quoting him correctly on the subject of estimates. He shall have his own figures. In 1860–61 the estimates were 70,100,000*l*., and the expendi-

ture was 72,842,000*l.* Error in the year 1860–61, 2,642,000*l.* The estimates of 1861–62 were 69,875,000*l.*, and the expenditure was 70,838,000*l.* Error in 1861–62, 963,000*l.* The estimates of 1862–63, which we have just had, are 69,120,000*l.*; and as, of course, we cannot yet get at the expenditure, I put opposite this estimate a colossal query. But, Sir, if you compare the estimates of this year with the estimates of the last, the diminution is only 750,000*l.*, not 1,750,000*l.*, and if honourable gentlemen below the gangway think that is a reduction which inaugurates an epoch of retrenchment, they are more easily satisfied than their speeches—I do not say their votes—would imply.

Having thus placed clearly before the House and the country our exact financial position, our deficits, our anticipated resources, and the prospect before us, I say that I have shown to the House that the three excuses which were offered by the right honourable gentleman to account for and extenuate our actual financial position, and to calm down the public mind, which is necessarily and rightly agitated, are utterly flimsy. The debt has not been reduced; retrenchment is all moonshine; and, should any critical circumstances occur this year, either in America or Europe, that may require England to increase her expenditure, where are we? Where is the surplus for us to fall back upon? The abolition of the paper-duty was wrung from a reluctant House of Commons; the duty was repealed in defiance of a solemn decision of the other House of Parliament; and we may yet appeal to history to vindicate the wisdom of that House. But there is another subject that I think more alarming even than increased taxation, and those accounts of financial disaster that can be no longer concealed. The whole speech of the right honourable gentleman when he referred to taxation seemed based on the principle that the income-tax is to be a permanent feature of our financial system. He referred to half-a-dozen other taxes which he could not yet repeal, and to some that he could soften; but the whole tone of the right honourable gentleman's discourse was that the income-tax is to be a permanent part of our financial system. Is that the opinion of the House of Commons? I do not for-

lieve it possible that the income-tax in its present form can be a permanent part of our financial system. Though I have listened to every suggestion that has been made on the subject, and weighed them, I trust, with patience and without partiality, I have yet met with no scientific solution of the difficulties connected with this tax that would be satisfactory to the Treasury of Her Majesty. The income-tax remains, as described by the right honourable gentleman himself, unjust, unequal, and inquisitorial, as when it was branded with that character of infamy by the right honourable gentleman, when he made it the basis of his most considerable and most fallacious financial measure. I therefore think we had a right to expect that the right honourable gentleman should on this occasion have spoken frankly on the question of the income-tax. He has no right to fritter away the resources of the country and leave that tax pressing upon us.

There is something in the speeches of the right honourable gentleman on this subject, and, indeed, on the whole of our financial system, that fills me with perplexity; which, I think, conveys to the country a sentiment, not merely of perplexity, but of distrust; and it is this—that, while the right honourable gentleman is without parallel or exception the most profuse Finance Minister that ever directed the affairs of this country in time of peace, he is perpetually insinuating—to use the mildest term—both to this House and to the country, that he disapproves of our expenditure, and that he is burning to denounce it. Now, I say that is not a legitimate position for the right honourable gentleman to occupy. If he disapproves of this profuse expenditure, why does he sit on that bench, and lend to its enactment and enforcement all the authority of his character and all the lustre of his reputation? If, on the contrary, he approves this expenditure, then his duty, as the Finance Minister especially, is not to dispirit and discontent the people, but rather to animate them and sustain their courage under the burdens it is his duty to impose upon them. He never proposes a vote—and it has fallen to him to propose the most profuse votes any minister has ever brought forward in time of peace—without an intimation that in his heart he





## MR. WALPOLE'S RESOLUTION, June 3, 1862.

[On Tuesday, June 3, the House of Commons met to consider a resolution proposed by Mr. Stansfeld to the effect that 'the national expenditure was capable of reduction without compromising the safety, the independence, or the legitimate influence of the country.' Lord Palmerston met the resolution by an amendment which was ultimately carried by 367 votes to 65. But Mr. Walpole had given notice of another amendment to be moved in substitution for Lord Palmerston's, which would have received the support of the entire Conservative party, and of a good many Liberals besides. Referring to this amendment before the debate began, Lord Palmerston observed that 'the question which the House would now be called on to decide was whether gentlemen who sat on the ministerial or the opposite benches were best entitled to the confidence of the House and the country.' By this language he drew from Mr. Walpole a declaration that he would not, under those circumstances, take the responsibility of moving his amendment. The effect was, of course, to reduce the debate, which might have involved a serious check to the ministry, to the level of a mere *reconnaissance*. Mr. Walpole did not formally give notice of his intention to abstain from moving until the main question had been put on Mr. Stansfeld's resolution; but it had been made generally known to the House, and is referred to by Mr. Disraeli in the following speech.]

**M**R. DISRAELI: From the address of the noble lord (Palmerston) I observed that one topic was studiously omitted; he avoided all reference to the present condition of our finances; though that position is described by a member of Her Majesty's Government as unhealthy, and is believed by Parliament and the people of England to be dangerous. The subject of national expenditure has been brought somewhat suddenly, it may be, but most earnestly under the consideration both of Parliament and of the people. I am sure I do not misrepresent the general feeling of the House when I say there is

a desire to effect all practicable reductions in that expenditure which are consistent with the complete efficiency of the public service, with the security of our shores, and with the guardianship of all those interests abroad which constantly engage our attention. Let me take the first point to which the noble lord adverted, and to which the first part of the honourable gentleman's resolution refers. Let us look to the question of our defences at home, of which we have lately heard so much. Well, that is not a new question. We have been establishing and completing our home defences for a considerable period. It is a subject which has engaged the attention of Parliament and the resources of this country now for ten years. Ten years ago a ministry was formed for the sole purpose of establishing a Militia throughout this country, founded on a popular principle. Well, a Militia on that principle was established—most successfully established. During the ten years that have elapsed that Militia has been embodied and disembodied, and has fed our regular army with soldiers equal to veterans. It has supplied our garrisons in the colonies with men whose discipline those who have commanded them have recognised as equal to that of the Line. When the war was finished the Militia was disembodied, and an appeal was made to the men who composed it for their annual attendance. At the time it was said that appeal was illusory. It has been responded to with an alacrity which we have seen displayed even within the last few weeks—I may say days. The manner in which the Militia has responded to the call made on it has shown us what an army has been completed, and I hope permanently established. And, Sir, the Government that ten years ago was called specifically into existence to effect that object accomplished another great object connected with our home defences. I allude to the establishment of the Channel Fleet. After that period this country was engaged in a war, and its immediate attention was for the moment turned from the specific object of its home defences; but the indirect effect of that war very much increased our means of defence at home; for it produced a perfect army in this country, which in every branch and every military attribute is recognised now as inferior to none in exist-

ence. Well, Sir, subsequently to all this we witnessed one of those spontaneous acts of public spirit which eminently distinguishes England, and now the great Volunteer movement produces an army admirable in its discipline—and which, I trust, will be of a permanent character. What will be the consequence of all those great incidents, as far as our home defences are concerned? Counting our regular army, which for some years on the average has never numbered less than 100,000 men, you have in England, or, at least, in the United Kingdom, a body of disciplined men, accustomed to the use of arms, of not less than from 350,000 to 400,000 men, a garrison for these islands equal almost to the army of France; and in addition you have the command of the Channel with your fleet. Therefore I say, as far as our home defences are concerned, we have not been idle or unsuccessful in our exertions; and it is difficult to conceive how any country can be in a position more completely secure than Great Britain is at this present moment. If, however, there be any proposition by which our home defences can be really improved, I am quite sure Parliament will listen to those propositions from any Government with the utmost attention; but for the present this great result remains, and none can deny it—that we have in England, and have had in England now for some years, a regular garrison—a national garrison I may call it—composed of regular troops, our Militia, our Volunteers, and other elements which it would be wearisome to dwell upon—scarcely less than 400,000 men; and we have in the Channel an efficient and commanding fleet. I am myself a supporter of such a state of affairs as regards our defences, and not with reference to any country contiguous to us, or with any disposition of hostility towards our neighbours.

My opinion is that this state of things ought to exist abstractedly, if I may use the term, with regard to the defences of this country. I would not recommend that programme of defences on the assumption of friendship on the part of our neighbours. That is an element which I, for one, have no wish to bring into consideration. On the other hand, I do not, as the noble lord does, argue for the necessity of those means of defence on the animosity of our neighbours. We ought to look

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My opinion is that this state of things ought to exist abstractedly, if I may use the term, with regard to the defences of this country. I would not recommend that programme of defences on the assumption of friendship on the part of our neighbours. That is an element which I, for one, have no wish to bring into consideration. On the other hand, I do not, as the noble lord does, argue for the necessity of those means of defence on the animosity of our neighbours. We ought to look

to our means of defence on this principle alone—whether they are adequate to the position which this country occupies. I must say I was astonished that, even within the recent period of the last few weeks, when we had a discussion on this subject the noble lord at the head of the Government concluded the debate by stating his view of the defences to be that the country should be prepared for an invasion of its shores by its nearest neighbour—prepared for some midnight foray of a cordial ally. Such a declaration confounds civilisation; and if a policy be founded on such principles, it must lead to national disaster. So much for our national defences; so much for that subject which has engaged the country and Parliament, more or less, for ten years. And what is this country you have so properly guarded and defended? Is it a country without any spirit of its own—is it like some other countries to which I shall not more particularly refer, where the Government is one of police, where there is no political liberty, no freedom of opinion, and where the Government can only trust to guards to protect them? The Government is unworthy to govern this country who forgets that the people of England are the most enthusiastic in the world. There are more excitable people—the people of France, for instance; but there is no people so enthusiastic as England has shown herself to be on this question of national defences. In this country, protected by 400,000 men and a commanding fleet in the Channel, to say that free-men are in danger of midnight invasion from cordial allies is a mystification too monstrous for belief.

I now come to the next point—our interests abroad. I have been trying to give some meaning to a phrase so vague. It has been stated that in all our stations throughout the world we should be defended by armed forces—that our foreign garrisons should be efficient; that our fortifications should be strong; and that our great naval stations in the Mediterranean and the West Indies should be commanding. Well, Sir, these are the sources of influence which England possesses in her intercourse with foreign Powers and foreign Courts. When it is known that the garrisons of England are strong, that her fleets are commanding, that her extensive and unrivalled commerce

in every quarter and in every clime is adequately defended, no doubt these are sources of respect and influence for us with foreign Courts and countries. But allow me to say that there is also another great source of influence, and perhaps the greatest that England possesses with foreign countries. I pretend to no more experience of foreign Courts and foreign statesmen than must have fallen to the lot of many, perhaps the majority of gentlemen in this House; but I have seen some, and I have in the course of my life been in communication with some of the most eminent statesmen of various countries—men of different political parties and varied experience—and I have always heard them use this language with regard to the influence of England: that the real cause of that influence of England—which influence is, perhaps, on an average, the most permanent throughout the Continent—has arisen from this circumstance, that England is the only country which, when it enters into a quarrel that it believes to be just, never ceases its efforts until it has accomplished its aim. Whereas (I do not now speak of present days and existing States) it was always felt in old times and generations that are past—and honourable gentlemen can ascertain whether the present state of Europe makes any difference in this matter—that, with scarcely an exception, there was not a State in Europe, not even the proudest and most powerful, that could ever enter into a third campaign. Well, what gave us this power of continuing war into which we had entered, and in which we were ready to persevere because we believed it to be just? It was the financial reserve of England. It was the conviction that the reserves of England, when we once chose to engage in a quarrel, were such that it was not a question of one, two, or three campaigns, but that, as we have proved in old days, our determination, supported by our resources, would allow us to prepare for an indefinite struggle when we had an adequate and worthy object in view. If, however, you allow your finances to be sapped and weakened, you are at the same time weakening this prime source of your authority. You may have these garrisons in foreign parts, these improved armaments, and these fleets of commanding power, but if you have also omitted the principal source of



your power—namely, a sound state of your finance—you may find you have omitted one of the most important elements of that influence abroad and that security for maintaining it of which we have heard so much.

We are asked sometimes, ‘Why do you not propose something definite when you talk of retrenchment?’ The answer is very obvious. In the position in which we stand we must deal with general truths and aim at general conclusions. It is only for gentlemen on the other side of that table to come forward with specific propositions on specific items; but I think it is not difficult even for those who sit on this side the table to place before the House some results which, if I have not mistaken the character of the House of Commons and the common sense of England, will not be listened to with carelessness and inattention. Whether you look at your home defences at the present moment, or the means which you possess of guarding your interests and maintaining your influence abroad, you have made adequate preparations. I have taken the necessary pains to calculate the cost of these home defences, of which I think we may be justly proud, and with which we may be perfectly satisfied. What also is the cost of those fleets and garrisons which we have abroad to guard our interests and maintain our influence? From an official document of which every honourable member is in possession, I have made a calculation of the united cost and expenditure of the country under these two heads. I find that when I have ascertained this expenditure it does not account for our military and naval expenditure by a vast sum; that, after supplying the sums necessary to maintain these defences and guard these interests, there still remains a vast amount of public expenditure under these heads that is still unaccounted for. Then, I say, at the first glance, there would appear to be some margin even in that view of the case of considerable and, in the present state of our finances, of necessary reduction. But then a plausible objection may be taken—and I am here to acknowledge its plausibility and to answer it, for we hear it every day when this question is brought forward—‘You forget that the naval and military condition of England is, at the present moment, one

of transition ; that you are changing in this age of scientific discovery, and especially of scientific discovery as applied to armaments, your whole system of armaments, and that this leads to the vast expenditure which cannot be accounted for.' Well, that is a satisfactory solution, provided one condition is fulfilled—that it is true. I will now examine its truth. We have before us now, in the statements of Ministers and in papers on our table, authentic information on these subjects. What have you done with regard to the armaments of your army, navy, and other forces during the last few years? You have done great things. You have completely armed your regular troops, in amount exceeding 200,000 men, with the most perfect weapon of modern invention—the Enfield rifle; you have armed your Militia, your Volunteers, you have armed even Canada with the Enfield rifle; and, having done all this, you have in store at this moment a number of Enfield rifles capable of arming your regular forces, your Militia, your Volunteers, and even Canada for the space of ten years. If you have effected these great results with your small arms, what have you done with your artillery? You have armed the whole of your foreign garrisons with Armstrong guns; you have armed your domestic garrisons with the same weapon; you have completely armed the whole of your field artillery with Armstrong guns; and you have for this current year 1862–63 voted money which will produce nearly 2,500 Armstrong guns, two-thirds having a calibre which altogether gives you about 5,000 guns of that character. You have done more than this—you have at this moment military stores which both in number and effectiveness exceed any collection of stores which this country has had for the last fifty years. My authority for that statement is one who long sat in this House, who was a great advocate of military expenditure, and a most distinguished member of the military profession; and I believe I am right in saying that from the siege-train to the ambulance England was never so profusely and so effectively furnished as at the present moment. The conclusion we must come to when we find that these armaments have been carried out so effectively and so completely, and apparently are so near entire fulfilment, is that the

time has come—and, in the present condition of affairs, we are compelled to ask whether it has come or not—when a considerable reduction may be made in our naval and military expenditure without the least impairing our home defences or the efficiency of those forces which defend our interests abroad.

But I may be told that I forget that, though our armaments are complete, our forces amounting to hundreds of thousands of men armed with the Enfield rifle, with arms enough in store to last for ten years—though at the end of the year we may have 5,000 Armstrong guns, two-thirds of which are of the highest calibre; though all our garrisons abroad, and nearly all at home, and all our field batteries are furnished with this unrivalled weapon—yet a great change has taken place in the materials by which ships are constructed. Let us see whether we cannot examine that point with some calmness. I am not going to enter into any controversy with the noble lord as to the relative number of iron ships possessed by France and ourselves. I think the time has not yet come when the rival powers of England and France in that respect are to be counted by iron ships. But, as the noble lord will always thrust his view of the question before us, I have taken the best pains I could to inform myself upon the subject, and I believe the statement repeated by the noble lord is a monstrous mystification. The noble lord always seems to count an order to construct an iron ship as an actual ship, forgetting altogether that, in France, when an order is given in the bureau of the Minister of Marine it is executed at leisure; sometimes it takes ten years to execute, and occasionally three or four years elapse before the construction of the vessel is commenced. But there is to be no rivalry about iron ships—our navy is not to be equal to France, but it is to be greatly superior. It is a necessary condition of our geographical position and our political power that our navy should be as superior to the navy of France as the army of France is superior to ours. But this I wish to impress upon the House—that the utmost caution and consideration are necessary in reconstructing the navy with these new materials, and in the case of these iron ships we must not conclude too rashly and too rapidly when any apparent novelty has been introduced that it is instantly to be

recognised as the type and model of perfection. When these great changes take place some caution and some temperateness of conduct are requisite, and I take it for granted that the noble lord is deeply conscious of the value of those virtues, because, though the whole resources of the country have been at his command since he held office, he has generally spent them in building wooden ships. If France has that superiority over us which the noble lord tells us she has, if she really has thirty-six to our twenty-five, more shame to the noble lord. Where are all the millions the noble lord has had?

Lord Palmerston: The right honourable gentleman has misapprehended me. I said France had thirty-six built and building to our twenty-five.

Mr. Disraeli: The same distinction applies to both; therefore I am quite right in my representation of the noble lord's argument. But I have not done yet with the noble lord on iron ships. If iron ships are wanted, let no false principles of economy prevent us voting the money, but take care first that they are wanted, and take care next that when the money is voted it is expended on iron ships. There was an extraordinary case only last session, when the noble lord, or some of his colleagues in this House under his immediate orders—though I rather think it was the noble lord himself—came down to this House and addressed us on this alarming subject, the iron navy of France. It was late in the session, and he succeeded in extorting from an appalled House of Commons an estimate of somewhere about 350,000*l.* for building iron ships. It so happens that not one shilling of this money has been employed in the construction of iron ships, but has been appropriated to an entirely different purpose. I don't think the noble lord will be able to deny the accuracy of that statement; and I say it is a monstrous thing for a minister to come down here to make sensation speeches about the iron navy, to obtain large votes from a credulous and enthusiastic House of Commons, and then to prorogue Parliament, as he will prorogue it again in a very short time, and then expend the resources of the country he has thus obtained for other objects and purposes. The conclusion I have arrived at from these views—general views, I admit,

but founded on authentic facts—is that at this moment we are entering into a great expenditure for military and naval purposes, which are not necessary for the security of our shores, or for the maintenance of our interests and influence abroad. These are considerations which I think the House should not allow wholly to escape its consideration. I am not at all prepared to agree that the expenditure of the present Government has been justified; but, as I said the other night, what is the use of talking about the past? What I want to know is, what is to be done at present and for the future; how, when we have before us a prospect of continuous deficits; we are to make both ends meet? I will make no comment upon the amendment of the honourable gentleman (Mr. D. Griffith) who sits up aloft—I will come to the amendment of the noble lord who, having on several occasions expressed his opinion that there ought to be no resolution whatever upon the subject, concludes by proposing two resolutions, and accompanies the proposal of those two resolutions with the lamest and most unsatisfactory reasons to account for them which I ever heard; because it was perfectly open to the noble lord to meet the resolution of the honourable member for Halifax and any succeeding amendment which became a substantive motion by the simple negative. It was not the least necessary for the noble lord to bring forward any resolutions, but if he did he should, at least, have brought forward satisfactory ones. Are these resolutions satisfactory? The noble lord is ‘deeply impressed with the necessity of economy in every department of the State,’ and that is the first time I ever heard he was. You may talk of eating the leek, but I think that is a supper which may satisfy even an Opposition. Well! the noble lord being ‘deeply impressed with the necessity of economy in every department of the State, is at the same time mindful of its obligations to provide for the security of the country at home, and the protection of its interests abroad.’ I think it is more than an obligation: but let that pass.

The noble lord says, ‘This House observes with satisfaction the decrease which has already been effected in the national expenditure.’ Upon the principle that it is no use talking of what has passed, I was perfectly prepared to vote for that state-

ment in the amended resolution of the right honourable gentleman the member for the University of Cambridge; but still, as we are got into criticism, I am bound to say to the House that there is not a word of truth in it. For reasons which I will give the House when the proper time comes, we would not in the amendment disturb a single word of the resolution of the noble lord which we could avoid altering, and we passed over expressions which many of my friends did not approve, and language to which I could not help objecting on the point of veracity. Let us come to the resolution of the noble lord—‘We observe with satisfaction the decrease which has already been effected in the national expenditure.’ The figures are very shortly stated, and they are very instructive. Our expenditure in 1860–61 was 72,521,825*l.* I deduct from that expenditure some items, and I am sure the House will recognise their fairness. I deduct the China vote, 3,043,000*l.*; a second China vote, 1,111,920*l.*; and I deduct the fortifications, 578,387*l.* The total of those deductions is 4,733,193*l.*, which being taken from 72,521,825*l.*, leaves the real expenditure, without those exceptional items, for that year at 67,788,632*l.* Now take the expenditure for the year 1861–62, in which these boasted deductions have been made. Our expenditure for that year was 70,838,441*l.* I deduct the China vote, 1,230,000*l.*; the *Trent* affair, 900,000*l.*, which is the estimate of the minister; and fortifications, 158,185*l.* The total deduction is 2,228,185*l.*, which being taken from 70,838,441*l.* leaves the expenditure 68,550,256*l.* So that the expenditure of 1860–61 was really 67,788,000*l.*, and the expenditure of 1861–62, 68,550,000*l.* Then we come to the expenditure of 1862–63, which is the present year. That expenditure is 69,000,293*l.* I deduct 500,000*l.* for China and 163,000*l.* for fortifications, and that leaves 68,337,293*l.* Here is the comparative expenditure for the three years. In 1860–61 it was 67,788,632*l.*; in 1861–62 it was 68,550,256*l.*; and in the present year 1862–63 it is not 68,550,000*l.*, but it is 68,337,000*l.* Therefore, I am glad to see there is 150,000*l.* which will allow us to vote for this resolution absolutely with a clear conscience. The noble lord says, ‘The House observes with satisfaction the decrease which has already been effected

in the national expenditure,' and if that decrease be of the character which I have shown, I fear the House will view with little satisfaction the reduction of expenditure which the noble lord holds out the hope of, and which is described in the following words:—'And trusts that such further diminution may be made therein as the future state of things may warrant.' What is the future state of things, and whoever heard of such language by a Minister of State? I can only account for this resolution, on the supposition that, like that unfortunate document, a Queen's Speech, it is the united composition of the whole cabinet. I say seriously to the House that when they are meeting to consider the condition of the country in consequence of the state of the finances—when the Prime Minister acknowledges that it is necessary that the House should come to some resolution, and that no one less than himself should propose it, that resolution ought to have some definite object. I do not say that it should be so precise as to tie down the minister, but, not treating the House like children, it should indicate some object and intimate some policy. In the present state of affairs the first duty of a ministry is to make such reductions as shall equalise our charges and our revenue, and as those reductions are effected to diminish the war taxation, which, used in a time of peace, is sapping and wasting that financial reserve which is the surest source of our influence with foreign nations and the best security for our prosperity at home. Under these circumstances, being forced to an opinion by the noble lord, who himself proposes this awkward and shambling vote of confidence in his own Government, we thought it very desirable that the objects which I have mentioned should be specifically indicated, and that a general policy should be defined. Therefore a resolution was prepared by my right honourable friend, who appears to have been appalled to-night by the address which has been made to him by the noble lord.

If our object were such as the noble lord supposes, if we were really intending an assault upon the Treasury bench, I do not suppose it would be quite impossible to find another commander who would lead us in the attack. But our object was only to assert, at a moment of great perplexity in the House, a

policy which we thought temperate and practicable, and which we believed the House must ultimately adopt, and public opinion sanction, without supposing that the noble lord would convert a proposal of that kind into a challenge to the Government of the country. I am not surprised, therefore, that my right honourable friend was shaken by the statement of the noble lord, which, although loudly supported by those about him, did not appear to me to recommend itself to the sense of propriety of the House generally. No doubt, the statement has produced considerable effect, because if the noble lord really means to say that an attempt on the part of the House of Commons to make his resolution on finance intelligible is an effort to upset the Government there is no doubt that it gives quite a new aspect to the proposal. I cannot conceal from myself the alarming consequences which might attend even the candid observations of my right honourable friend on this subject. If I had any intention such as the noble lord supposes, I do not know that I should have asked my right honourable friend to move this resolution; but it appeared to me that the resolution, on the expediency of which the House was universally decided, ought to be one that should secure the good opinion of the country, or at least that respect which an intelligible purpose always commands. I am not prepared to suggest any course which should effect that object. I see several amendments on the paper which are offered for the purpose of attaining it. With most of them I am obliged for one reason or another to differ. There remained that of my right honourable friend, which I was disposed to prefer to them all. To-morrow I believe we shall all be engaged elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> I daresay that many honourable gentlemen who take more interest than I do in that noble pastime will have their favourites. I hope they will not be so unlucky as to find their favourites bolting. If any are placed in that dilemma, they will be better able to understand and sympathise with my feelings on this occasion. I was extremely anxious that this resolution should have been adopted by the House, and I confess I had not myself much

<sup>1</sup> The 'Derby' was to be run the next day, and the House was to stand adjourned, as usual, to the day after.



doubt that the noble lord would have taken it. With this resolution we should have had something to guide us. We should have had a policy, temperately expressed, and only to be carried into effect if the circumstances of the country justified it. I cannot doubt that if the resolution had been unanimously accepted by the House we should have had next year on those benches a Government, composed no matter of what materials—except, indeed, it were formed by the honourable member for Halifax, and then I am sure we should have perpetual war—who would have submitted the expenditure of the country to a severe revision, with a view to that retrenchment which is perfectly consistent with the efficiency of the public service.

COMMERCIAL TREATY WITH ITALY, February 17, 1863.<sup>1</sup>

[This speech may be called the *locus classicus* of Mr. Disraeli's speeches on commercial treaties. The gist of it is that commercial treaties could do us very little good when, owing to our free-trade policy, we had nothing left to give in exchange.]

MR. DISRAELI: Sir, it is, I think, very much to the credit of the Liberal party that we have at last heard from an honourable gentleman a free-trade speech. I shall not offer any observations in vindication of those rags and shreds of protection of which the House has just been reminded. I think our opinion on that subject has been expressed in a manner which cannot be mistaken. Our sincerity as to the course of policy which it has been the wisdom of the country to pursue has been proved by as great sacrifices as can be made by public men. But upon the other side of the House—where honourable members are, or are supposed to be, the advocates of free trade and Parliamentary Reform—I did not expect to have heard this discussion commenced by the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs making a personal and violent attack upon my honourable friend near me, on the ground that because he advocates the policy of commercial treaties he is showing himself to be a new convert to the principles of free trade. Sir, I never heard that commercial treaties were connected with the abstract principle of a free exchange of commodities between nations. There is nothing very modern, I believe, in the invention of commercial treaties; nor am I aware that the Tory party have ever shown a disrelish to support commercial treaties, if commercial treaties are to be accepted, as we are told by a

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

member of the Government, as a test of sincerity in the belief in the principle of free trade. Why, Sir, commercial treaties even with France, have been negotiated successfully by Tory ministers many years before the present commercial treaty with France. There was the commercial treaty of Mr. Pitt, which was only a reproduction of the treaty which Lord Bolingbroke, a Tory minister, negotiated successfully more than 150 years ago for the exchange of products between England and France on terms much easier than those that at present exist. And why was that treaty negotiated, but not ratified? Why was it defeated? It was defeated through the opposition of the Whig party in this House. Mr. Addison, one of the most distinguished members that ever sat in this House, and who afterwards was Secretary of State, exerted all his wit and unrivalled powers of humour and composition in ridiculing the arrival of a distinguished foreigner in this country—one Count Tariffe, whose mission was to introduce the habit of free exchange of commodities between two great nations. Those powers of ridicule and humour, supported by the unfortunate prejudices of the country, defeated that treaty. Therefore, nothing can be more unfounded than to suppose that because we on this side of the House are in favour of commercial treaties we are in fact at all deserting those principles which have been habitually supported, I may almost say for centuries, by the Tory party. But the honourable Under Secretary of State attacks my friend, and says: ‘Because you are a supporter of a commercial treaty I hold you up to public reprobation as only a recent convert to the principles of free trade.’

Now, Sir, if there can be anything opposed to the abstract principles of free exchange upon which unrestricted competition depends, it is, it must be, those regulations or conventions by which reciprocal advantages are sought in the commercial exchange of nations. You are departing from those principles which you take every opportunity of claiming as your own; you are departing from the ground of pure science and inexorable logic the moment you attempt to negotiate the terms upon which commercial exchange shall take place. Now, in the case of the French treaty we came forward with certain advantages

which we proposed to exchange for others. That I thought myself at the time, generally speaking, to be a most wise policy. I thought, and always have thought, that anything which favoured commercial exchange between England and France was a policy which each country ought to favour, but the scheme was entirely contrary to those abstract principles of free exchange which you have always upheld. Nothing, then, can be more inconsistent than to reproach any gentleman on this side because he supports commercial treaties. I remember, Sir, many years ago, introducing the subject of commercial treaties to this House. It was before the honourable member for Rochdale, a gentleman who on all subjects shows great capacity, was one of its members. But having supported in that motion the system of commercial treaties, as one which I thought would, upon the whole, most promote the increase of the commerce of this country, I remember being attacked out of the House by the honourable member on that subject. I do not know whether the words were uttered aloud, so that we can find them in authentic record ; but I can say from my own personal experience, that no less a personage than Sir Robert Peel said upon that occasion, ‘Don’t you think we have heard the last of commercial treaties?’

Well, Sir, we had not heard the last of commercial treaties. A very considerable commercial treaty was destined to be negotiated years after. So shrewd, so sagacious a statesman as Sir Robert Peel, so cautious in expressing his opinion, in 1844 probably was, then, of the belief that we had heard the last of commercial treaties. Yet we had not heard the last of commercial treaties. A most important commercial treaty was afterwards negotiated, and by whom? By the honourable gentleman the member for Rochdale (Mr. Cobden). Now, that is a lesson to all of us. It teaches us this—that, whatever the value or the truth of abstract principles, it is in their application—in the wise and necessary application of those principles, that is involved the prosperity of nations. Now, Sir, I think we are very much indebted to my honourable friend for bringing this subject before us; not that I think the observations he has made to-night, or the interesting debate which has followed,

will at all advance in this country the question of commercial treaties. I think we have got into a position in which that is impracticable: but the discussion will at least teach the country the position which upon that subject it really occupies. We have no means of negotiation; and it is most unwise, in my opinion, to hold out generally to the country that the Government have the power of negotiating treaties of commercial advantage. The country has accepted the policy of unrestricted competition. If it be dissatisfied with that policy, let it frankly announce its dissatisfaction. But we cannot have the advantage of a policy of unrestricted competition and at the same time, as regards commerce, enjoy the advantage of exchange under diplomatic arrangement—it is impossible at once to enjoy both. The country now wants to have the double advantage, but warning enough has been given. You have been told often and often by members of this House that whether it regards commerce, or whether it respects navigation, you were too liberal in parting with the advantages and privileges you possessed; but the principles of unrestricted competition were adopted, and it is now too late to inquire whether you were right or wrong. The policy which you then supported was accepted, and by that policy you must, in my opinion, stand. Why, in navigation alone, I remember how constantly you were told that you were needlessly giving up a thousand points. The constant answer was, ‘Only make the surrender, only endure the sacrifice, and you will see that your example will inspire others.’ I am not aware myself of the satisfactory returns to which those sacrifices have tended. They appear to me, as far as I can recall them at this moment, to be very slight and mean. But the policy was adopted after great discussion—after frequent appeals to the country—after great debate in this House, and great political consequences; and that you should now endeavour to combine the commercial advantages which accrue from unrestricted competition with the benefits which can only attend upon diplomatic arrangements, is a monstrous effort, which, depend upon it, must end in failure. It is not now for you to come forward—you who favour free trade and commercial treaties—and find fault with the Government be-

cause they cannot accomplish such results. You have yourselves resolved that the means which only can bring about these arrangements should be surrendered at discretion. You gave them up without condition, and it is impossible now to resume the position you have lost. But that is no reason whatever why the Government should attempt to carry on negotiations in this matter in the manner that the present Government does.

The Government know very well the position they occupy, and we are painfully conscious of it; and the Government, who are always better instructed than the House of Commons, must be doubly conscious of the difficulty of attempts to negotiate commercial treaties. The fault I find with the Government in pretending to negotiate commercial treaties is that they hold out an idea to the country that by an Italian or Austrian treaty they would create a great interchange. They know that it is impossible they can do it. It would be more dignified, to my mind, to hold aloof. Having adopted a commercial system the principle of which is unrestricted competition, it would be more dignified, and I believe, in the end, more successful, if you held aloof rather than pretend you can negotiate these treaties. Every day we hear, 'We have had a successful commercial treaty with France; why not with Italy—why not with Austria?' You know very well that you cannot have the same results as with France. You had something to give to France. You had the principle of reciprocity to act with, the principle which you have always despised and always condemned. That led to your success—that led to the results which have been obtained, and you claimed that as a discovery which was accomplished more than a century ago by some of the greatest statesmen that ever have existed in this country. It is past—the age of commercial treaties is past, because you have no means and no materials for negotiation. All you can do is to exercise that moral influence, of which we hear so much, with foreign countries with which you are placed in communication, to lead them by your own example and your own prosperity. Never mind whether it arose from your present or your old system of commerce—for the old as well as the present

system of commerce has equally brought prosperity to this country—from the contemplation of that prosperity the conviction will grow in those countries that with immense resources they are producing small revenues; that they are not raising revenues that bear a due relation to their resources, and you may trust to that to lead to reciprocal exchanges and mutual benefits in commercial transactions. But you will gain that as completely, and perhaps sooner, without the embarrassment of commercial treaties than you would with these conventions. I regret that, through the conduct of the Government and through the extraordinary behaviour of the free-trade party in patronising artificial agreements of exchange, there has arisen in this country the impression that the best and most politic mode of stimulating commerce is to have recourse to that method. That was a good theory twenty years ago, and not only a good theory, but a good theory which could be put in beneficial practice. I will not enter into a discussion now—at all times a barren controversy—whether if, twenty years ago, you had followed the principle of commercial exchange you would have derived more advantage than by suddenly adopting the principle of unrestricted competition. You have adopted unrestricted competition as the principle of your commercial code. By accident certain articles were excepted, and two years ago you used them as the means of negotiating a treaty of commerce with a great country, with a large population, and with very rich and valuable resources. You have played all your cards, and to attempt at the present moment—to pretend that you can assist and support the commerce of this country by commercial treaties is a mere delusion.

No doubt the Government of this country may make use of its legitimate influence to obtain commercial advantages, but to obtain treaties on commercial and political principles are two different subjects; and my honourable friend is perfectly right in pointing out how important it is that the Government, when holding out the principle of commercial treaties as one highly advantageous to our allies, should not follow at the same time a general policy which irritates the feelings and offends the pride of foreign Governments. In taking that line my honour-

able friend is highly to be commended, and no doubt what he has said will lead to suggestions in the public mind which will be advantageous. At the same time, I regret very much that honourable gentlemen opposite, after so many years, during which they have held with so much tenacity abstract opinions on commercial exchange, should now come forward and be agitating the country with the absolute necessity of making artificial arrangements for stimulating the commerce of the country. The plan which they seem now to foster is one not founded on right principles, and practically cannot be carried into effect ; and any commercial treaties which England may now negotiate, and which when they are negotiated must be beneficial to the different countries concerned, no man can deny must be negotiated by political influence, and not by the influence of commercial considerations.





PART IV.  
*PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.*

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BOROUGH FRANCHISE . . .	MAY 8, 1865.
ON INTRODUCING BILL OF 1867 .	MARCH 18, 1867.
SECOND READING           ,, .	MARCH 26, 1867.
MR. GLADSTONE'S AMENDMENT (COMPOUND HOUSEHOLDERS) .	APRIL 12, 1867.
THIRD READING . . . .	JULY 15, 1867.
COUNTY FRANCHISE . . . .	MAY 18, 1874.



# PARLIAMENTARY REFORM, May 8, 1865.

[The Government which succeeded Lord Derby in 1859 came into office pledged to settle the Reform question, but they failed as he had failed, and after the withdrawal of their Bill in 1860, allowed the question to drop. Their followers, however, were not equally willing to abandon it, and a running fire was kept up by Mr. Locke King and Mr. Baines during the whole of Lord Palmerston's administration. On the second reading of a Bill introduced by the latter in 1865, for the reduction of the Borough Franchise, Mr. Disraeli spoke as follows in support of Lord Elcho, who moved the previous question.]

**MR. DISRAELI:** Sir, I could have wished, and once I almost believed, that it was not necessary for me to take part in this debate. I look on this discussion as the natural epilogue to the Parliament of 1859. We remember the prologue. I consider this to be a controversy between the 'educated section of the Liberal party,'<sup>1</sup> and that section of the Liberal party not entitled, according to their companions and colleagues, to an epithet so euphuistic and complimentary. But after the speech of the minister, I hardly think it would become me—representing the opinions of the gentlemen with whom I am acting on this side of the House—entirely to be silent.

Sir, we have a measure before us to-night which is to increase the franchise in boroughs. I object to that measure. I object to it because an increase of the franchise in boroughs is a proposal to re-distribute political power in the country. I do not think that the distribution of political power in the country ought to be treated partially—from the very nature of things it is impossible, if there is to be a re-distribution of political power,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Hartington, when he proposed in 1859 a vote of want of confidence in Lord Derby's Government, counselled a coalition between the Whigs and the Radicals, and described the Whigs as 'the educated section of the Liberal party.'

that you can only regard the suffrage as it affects one section of the constituent body.

Whatever the proposition of the honourable gentleman—whether abstractedly it be expedient or not—this is quite clear, that it must be considered not only in relation to the particular persons with whom it will deal, but in relation to other persons with whom it does not deal, although it may affect them. And, therefore, it has always been clear that if you deal with the subject popularly called Parliamentary Reform, you must deal with it comprehensively. The arrangements you may make with reference to one part of the constituency may not be objectionable in themselves, but may be extremely objectionable if you consider them with relation to other parts. Consequently, it has been held—and the more we consider the subject the more true and just appears to be the conclusion—that if you deal with the matter you must deal with it as a whole. You must not only consider borough constituencies, you must consider county constituencies; and when persons rise up and urge their claims to be introduced into the constituent body, even if you think there is a plausible case substantiated on their part, you are bound in policy and justice to consider also the claim of other bodies not in possession of the franchise, but whose right to consideration may be equally valid. And so clear is it, when you come to the distribution of power, that you must consider the question in all its bearings, that even honourable gentlemen who have taken part in this debate, which is one merely on the borough franchise, have not been able to avoid the question of what they call the re-distribution of seats—a very important part of the question to which I have referred, the distribution of power.

It is easy for the honourable member for Liskeard (Mr. Bernal Osborne), for example, to rise and say, in supporting this measure for the increase of the borough franchise, that it is impossible any longer to conceal the anomalies of our system in regard to the distribution of seats. ‘Is it not monstrous,’ he asks, ‘that Calne, with 173 voters, should return a member, while Glasgow returns only two, with a constituency of 20,000?’ Well, it may be equally monstrous that Liskeard should return

one member, and that Birkenhead should only make a similar return. Sir, the distribution of seats—as anyone must know who has ever considered the subject deeply and with a sense of responsibility towards the country—is one of the most profound and difficult questions that can be brought before the House. It is all very well to treat it in an easy offhand manner; but how are you to reconcile the case of North Cheshire, of North Durham, of West Kent, and many other counties, where you find a few towns, with an aggregate population, perhaps, of 100,000, returning six members to this House, while the rest of the population of the county, though equal in amount, returns only two members? How are you to meet the case of the West Riding in reference to its boroughs, or the case of the representation of South Lancashire in reference to its boroughs? Why, those are more anomalous than the case of Calne. Then there is the question of Scotland. With a population hardly equal to that of the metropolis, and with wealth greatly inferior—probably not more than two-thirds of the amount—Scotland yet possesses forty-eight members, while the metropolis has only twenty. Do you reformers mean to say that you are prepared to disfranchise Scotland in proportion to the population; or that you are going to develop the representation of the metropolis in proportion to its population and property; and so allow a country like England, so devoted to local government and so influenced by local feeling, to be governed by London? And therefore, when those speeches are made which gain a cheer for the moment, and are supposed to be unanswerable as arguments in favour of Parliamentary change, I would recommend the House to recollect that this as a question is one of the most difficult and one of the deepest that can possibly engage the attention of the country. The fact is, in the representation of this country other elements enter besides merely population and property—you have to take care that the country itself is represented. That is one reason why I am opposed to the second reading of the Bill—because it deals partially with the subject, and not completely and comprehensively.

Sir, there is another objection which I have to this Bill



political connection and to whom I have been placed in constant opposition in this House when he was an honoured member of it—I mean Lord Russell. I cannot at all agree with the lively narrative of the right honourable gentleman, according to which Parliamentary Reform was but the creature of Lord John Russell, whose cabinet, controlled by him with the vigour of a Richelieu, at all times disapproved his course; still less can I acknowledge that merely to amuse himself, or in a moment of difficulty to excite some popular sympathy, Lord John Russell was a statesman always with a Reform Bill in his pocket, ready to produce it and make a display. How different, says the right honourable gentleman, from that astute and sagacious statesman now at the head of Her Majesty's Government—whom I almost hoped to have seen in his place this evening. I am sure it would have given the House great pleasure to have seen him here, and I certainly did hope that the noble lord would have been enabled to be in his place and prepared to support his policy.

According to the animated but not accurate account of the right honourable gentleman who has just sat down, all that Lord Derby did was to sanction and humour the caprices of Lord John Russell. Now, I must remind the right honourable gentleman that he has forgotten the history of the subject, recent though it be. It is true that Lord John Russell, when Prime Minister, originally recommended that Her Majesty in the Speech from the Throne, should call the attention of Parliament to the condition of our representative system. There is no doubt about that. But Lord John Russell unfortunately shortly afterwards retired from his eminent position. He was soon after succeeded by one of the most considerable statesmen of our days—a statesman not connected with the political school of Lord John Russell, who was supported by a whole staff of eminent statesmen who had been educated in the same school as himself, and under the same distinguished master. This eminent statesman, however, is entirely forgotten by the right honourable gentleman, although he took office with every advantage. The right honourable gentleman overlooks the fact that Lord Aberdeen, when Prime Minister, and when all the principal



places in his cabinet were filled with the disciples of Sir Robert Peel, did think it his duty to recommend the same counsel to Her Majesty. But this is an important, though not the only important item in the history of the Reform Bill which has been ignored by the right honourable gentleman. But is this all? The time came when Lord Aberdeen gave place to another statesman, one who has been complimented to-night on his sagacity in evading the subject,—as if such a course could be a subject for congratulation. Let me vindicate the policy of Lord Palmerston in his absence. He did not evade the question. Lord Palmerston followed the example of Lord John Russell. He followed the example, also, of Lord Aberdeen, and recommended Her Majesty to notice the subject of Parliamentary Reform in the Speech from the Throne.

What becomes, then, of the lively narrative of the right honourable gentleman, and the inference and conclusions which he drew from it? Not only is his account inaccurate, but it is injurious, as I take it, to the honour of public men. Well, now you have three Prime Ministers—not one, merely from caprice or personal littleness—bringing forward the question of Parliamentary Reform; you have Lord John Russell, Lord Aberdeen, and you have even that statesman who, according to the account of the right honourable gentleman, was so eminent for his sagacity in evading the subject altogether. Now, let me ask the House to consider the position of Lord Derby when he was called to power—a position which you cannot rightly understand if you accept as correct the fallacious statements of the right honourable gentleman. I will give the House an account of this subject the accuracy of which I believe neither side will impugn. It may not possibly be without interest, and will not, I am sure, be without significance. Lord Derby was sent for by Her Majesty, an unwilling candidate for office—for let me remind the House that at that moment he had an adverse majority of 140 in the House of Commons, and I therefore do not think that Lord Derby was open to any imputation in hesitating to accept political responsibility under such circumstances. Lord Derby laid these considerations before Her Majesty. I speak, of course, with reserve, yet really say nothing

now which I have not been authorised to say before in the discussion of these matters in this House. But when a Government comes in on Reform and remains in power six years without passing any measure of the kind, it is possible that these circumstances, too, may be lost sight of. Lord Derby advised Her Majesty not to form a Government under his influence, because there existed so large a majority against him in the House of Commons, and because this question of Reform was placed in such a position that it was impossible not to deal with it, and he did not wish to deal with it. For it should be remembered that Lord Derby was a member of the famous cabinet which carried the Reform Bill in 1832. Lord Derby, as Mr. Stanley, was in the House of Commons one of the most efficient promoters of the measure. Lord Derby believed that the Act of 1832 had tended to effect the purpose for which it was designed; and although no man, superior, as he is, to prejudice, could fail to see that some who were qualified for the exercise of the franchise were still debarred from the privilege, yet he could not also fail to perceive the danger which would arise in a country like England from constantly tampering with the franchise, and that therefore it was inexpedient to deal with the question. On these grounds Lord Derby declined the honour which Her Majesty desired to confer upon him.

Her Majesty was then left without advisers, and the appeal to Lord Derby was repeated. Under such circumstances it was impossible for any English statesman to hesitate. But I am bound to say that although there was no contract or understanding further than that which prevails among men, however different their politics, who love their country and wish to maintain its greatness, still there was an understanding at the time among men of weight on both sides of the House that the position in which the Reform question was placed was one embarrassing to the Crown and not creditable to the House, and that any minister trying his best to deal with it under these circumstances would receive, not a pledge of support to his measure—that would be impossible and preposterous—but would be insured the candid consideration of the House. It was thought, moreover, that the time had possibly arrived when

both parties might unite in endeavouring to bring about a solution to the advantage and benefit of the country. Under these circumstances Lord Derby gave his mind to the measure. And yet, says 'the right honourable gentleman who has just addressed you, it was only in 1860 that the portentous truth flashed across the mind of the country that the question of Parliamentary Reform was this—was it possible to admit a portion of the working classes to the enjoyment of the franchise, without impairing the Constitution of the country—it was only in 1860, after so many ministers had been dealing with the question for so many years that this real state of the question flashed upon the conscience of the country. All I can say is that this was the question, and the only question, which engaged the attention of Lord Derby's cabinet in 1858. The question was, whether they could secure the franchise for a certain portion of the working classes who, by their industry, their intelligence, and their integrity, showed that they were worthy of such a possession, without at the same time overwhelming the rest of the constituency by the numbers of those whom they admitted. That, Sir, was the only question which occupied the attention of the Government of Lord Derby; and yet the right honourable gentleman says that it was only in 1860 that the attention of the public was first called to the subject, when, in fact, the question of Parliamentary Reform had been before them for more than ten years, and on a greater scale than that embraced by the measure under consideration this evening.

I need not remind the House of the reception which Lord Derby's Bill encountered. It is neither my disposition, nor, I am sure, that of any of my colleagues, to complain of the votes of this House on that occasion, nor to indulge in reproaches against any of its members. Political life must be taken as you find it, and so far as I am concerned not a word shall escape me on the subject. But from the speeches made on the first night of this debate, and from the speech made by the right honourable gentleman this evening, I deem it my duty to vindicate the conduct pursued by the party with which I act. I say we were perfectly well aware of the great question which it was our

business to solve, and I say this now which I would not have said under other circumstances, that I believe that the measure which we brought forward was the only one which has attempted to meet its difficulties. Totally irrespective of other modes of dealing with the question, there were two franchises especially proposed on that occasion which, in my mind, would have done much towards solving them. The first was the franchise founded upon personal property, and the second the franchise founded upon partial occupation. Those two franchises, irrespective of other modes by which we attempted to meet the want and the difficulty—those two franchises, had they been brought into Committee of this House, would, in my opinion, have been so shaped and adapted that they would have effected those objects which the majority of the House desire. We endeavoured in that Bill to make proposals which were in the genius of the English Constitution. It is easy to speak of the English Constitution as a mere phrase. We did not consider the Constitution a mere phrase. We knew that the Constitution of this country is a monarchy tempered by the authority of co-ordinate estates of the realm. We knew that the House of Commons is an estate of the realm. We knew that an estate of the realm is a political body, invested with political power for the government of the country and for the public good: therefore, a body founded upon privilege and not upon right. It is therefore in the noblest and properest sense of the word an aristocratic body, and from the first the estate of the Commons has had that character. From that characteristic the Reform Bill of 1832 did not derogate; and if at this moment we could contrive, as we proposed to do in 1859, to add considerably to the number of the constituent body, we should not change that characteristic, but it would still remain founded upon an aristocratic principle.

Well, now the right honourable gentleman the Secretary of State<sup>1</sup> has addressed us to-night in a remarkable speech. He also takes up the history of Reform; but before I touch upon some of the features of that speech it is my duty to refer to the statements which he made with regard to the policy which

<sup>1</sup> Sir George Grey.

the Government of Lord Derby was prepared to assume after the general election of 1859. By a total misrepresentation of the character of the amendment proposed by Lord John Russell, which threw the Government in 1859 into a minority, and by quoting a passage from a very long speech of mine in 1859, the right honourable gentleman most dexterously conveyed these two propositions to the House—first, that Lord John Russell had proposed an amendment to our Reform Bill, by which the House declared that no Bill could be satisfactory by which the working classes were not admitted to the franchise—one of our main objects being that the working classes should in a great measure be admitted to the franchise; and, secondly, that after the election I was prepared, as the organ of the Government, to give up all the schemes of those franchises founded upon personal property, partial occupation, and other grounds, and to substitute a Bill lowering the borough qualification. That, in the first place, conveyed to the House a totally inaccurate idea of the amendment of Lord John Russell. There was not a single word in that amendment about the working classes. There was not a single phrase upon which that issue was raised; nor could it have been raised, because our Bill, whether it could have effected the object or not, was a Bill which proposed greatly to enfranchise the working classes. And, in the second place, as regards the statement I made, it simply was this. The election was over—we were still ministers, and, still acting according to our sense of duty, recommended in the Royal Speech that the question of Parliamentary Reform should be dealt with; because I must be allowed to remind the House that, whatever may have been our errors, we never paltered with the Reform question—we proposed a Bill which we intended to carry. And having once taken up the question as a matter of duty, no doubt greatly influenced by what we considered the unhappy mistakes of our predecessors, and the difficult position in which they had placed the Crown, Parliament, and the country, we determined not to leave the question until it had been settled. As ministers of the Crown, we felt it to be our duty to recommend to Her Majesty to introduce the question of Reform in the Speech from the

Throne which opened the Parliament of 1859. And how were we, except in that spirit of compromise which is the principal characteristic of our political system—how could we introduce a Reform Bill after that election, without in some degree considering the possibility of lowering the borough franchise? But it was not a franchise of 6*l.*, but an arrangement that was to be taken with the rest of the Bill, and if it had been met in the same spirit, a measure might have been passed.

But, says the right honourable baronet, pursuing his history of the Reform question, ‘when the Government of Lord Derby retired from office, we came in and we were perfectly sincere in our intentions to carry that Reform Bill to which we had pledged ourselves and by means of which we had driven the Government from office; but look at the opposition we received—there never was such opposition! There was the right honourable gentleman’—meaning myself—‘he absolutely allowed our Bill to be read a second time.’ That tremendous reckless opposition of mine which allowed the Bill to be read a second time, seems to have laid the Government prostrate. If I had succeeded in throwing out the Bill, we should have relieved the new Government from great embarrassment; but, their Bill having been read a second time, the Government were quite overcome, and, it appears, have never recovered the paralysis up to this time.

The right honourable gentleman was good enough to say that the proposition of his Government was rather coldly received upon his side of the House, but he said ‘nobody spoke against it.’ Certainly, nobody spoke against the Bill on this side; but I think I remember some remarkable speeches from the right honourable gentleman’s friends against their measure. There was the great city of Edinburgh<sup>1</sup> represented by an acute eloquence of which we never weary, and which again upon the present occasion we have heard; there was the great city of Bristol,<sup>2</sup> represented also by a devoted supporter of the Government, and many other constituencies of equal importance. But the most remarkable speech—the speech which ‘killed Cock

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Black.

<sup>2</sup> Hon. F. H. F. Berkeley.

Robin'—was absolutely delivered by one who might be described as a member of the Government, the Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Massey), and who, I believe, spoke from immediately behind the Prime Minister. Did the Government express any disapprobation of such conduct? They promoted him to a great post, and sent him to India with an income of fabulous amount. And now they are astonished they cannot carry a Reform Bill! If they remove all those among their supporters who oppose such Bills by preferring them to posts of great confidence and great lucre, how can they suppose that will ever carry one?

Looking at the policy of the Government, I am not at all astonished at the speech which the right honourable gentleman the Secretary of State has made this evening, of which speech I may observe, that although it was remarkable for many things, yet there were two salient conclusions at which the right honourable gentleman arrived: first, the repudiation of the rights of man; and next, the repudiation of the 6*l.* franchise. The first is a great relief: and, remembering what the feeling of the House was only a year ago, when, by the dangerous eloquence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, we were led to believe that the days of Tom Paine had returned, and that Rousseau was to be rivalled in a new social contract,<sup>1</sup> it must be a vast relief to every respectable man here to find that not only are we not to have the rights of man, but we are not even to have the 6*l.* franchise. It is a matter, I think, of much congratulation, and I am ready to give credit to the Secretary of State for the honesty with which he has expressed himself; I only wish we had had the same frankness, the same honesty of expression, arising from a clear view of his subject, in the first year of the Parliament as we have had in the last. I will follow the example of the right honourable gentleman and his friends, and be frank. I have not changed my opinion upon the subject of what is called Parliamentary Reform. All that has occurred; all that I have observed; all the results of my reflections lead me to this more and more—that the principle

<sup>1</sup> Alluding to Mr. Gladstone's speech on Mr. Baines' Borough Franchise Bill, 1864.

upon which the constituencies of this country should be increased is one not of radical, but, I would say, of lateral reform—the extension of the franchise, not its degradation. Although—I do not wish in any way to deny it—being in the most difficult position when the Parliament of 1859 met, being anxious to assist the Crown and the Parliament, by proposing some moderate measure which men on both sides might support, we did to a certain extent agree to some modification of the 10*l.* franchise, yet I confess that my present opinion is opposed, as it originally was, to any course of the kind. I think that it would fail in its object; that it would not secure the introduction of that particular class which we all desire to introduce, but that it would introduce many others who are unworthy of the suffrage. But, Sir, I retain those opinions; I think it is possible to increase the electoral body of the country, if the opportunity were favourable and the necessity urgent, by the introduction of voters upon principles in unison with the principles of the Constitution, so that the suffrage should remain a privilege, and not a right—a privilege to be gained by virtue, by intelligence, by industry, by integrity, and to be exercised for the common good. And I think if you quit that ground—if you once admit that a man has a right to vote whom you cannot prove to be disqualified for it, you would change the character of the Constitution, and you would change it in a manner which will tend to lower the importance of this country.

Between the scheme we brought forward and the measure now brought forward by the honourable member for Leeds, and the inevitable conclusion which its principal supporters acknowledge it must lead to, it is a question between an aristocratic government in the proper sense of the term—that is, a government by the best men of all classes—and a democracy. I doubt very much whether a democracy is a government that would suit this country; and it is just as well that the House when coming to a vote on this question should really consider if that be the issue—and it is the real issue—between retaining the present Constitution—not the present constituent body, but between the present Constitution and a democracy—it is



just as well for the House to recollect that the stake is not mean—that what is at issue is of some price. You must remember, not to use the epithet profanely, that we are dealing really with a peculiar people. There is no country at the present moment that exists under the circumstances and under the same conditions as the people of this realm. You have, for example, an ancient, powerful, richly-endowed Church and perfect religious liberty. You have unbroken order and complete freedom. You have landed estates as large as the Romans, combined with commercial enterprise such as Carthage and Venice united never equalled. And you must remember that this peculiar country, with these strong contrasts, is not governed by force; it is not governed by standing armies; it is governed by a most singular series of traditionary influences, which generation after generation cherishes and preserves because it knows that they embalm custom and represent law. And, with this, what have you done? You have created the greatest Empire of modern time. You have amassed a capital of fabulous amount. You have devised and sustained a system of credit still more marvellous. And, above all, you have established and maintained a scheme so vast and complicated of labour and industry, that the history of the world offers no parallel to it. And all these mighty creations are out of all proportion to the essential and indigenous elements and resources of the country. If you destroy that state of society, remember this—England cannot begin again.

There are countries which have been in great danger and gone through great suffering; the United States, for example, whose fortunes are now so perilous, and who in our own immediate day have had great trials; you have had—perhaps even now in the United States of America you have—a protracted and fratricidal civil war which has lasted for four years; but if it lasted for four years more, vast as would be the disaster and desolation, when ended the United States might begin again, because the United States then would only be in the same condition that England was at the end of the War of the Roses, when probably she had not even 3,000,000 of population, with vast tracts of virgin soil and mineral treasures, not only unde-

veloped but undreamt of. Then you have France. France had a real revolution in this century—a real revolution, not merely a political but a social revolution. The institutions of the country were uprooted, the orders of society abolished—even the landmarks and local names removed and erased. But France could begin again. France had the greatest spread of the most exuberant soil in Europe, and a climate not less genial ; she had, and always had, comparatively, a limited population, living in a most simple manner. France, therefore, could begin again. But England—the England we know, the England we live in, the England of which we are proud—could not begin again. I do not mean to say that after great troubles England would become a howling wilderness, or doubt that the good sense of the people would, to some degree, prevail, and some fragments of the national character survive ; but it would not be old England—the England of power and tradition, of credit and capital, that now exists. It is not in the nature of things ; and, Sir, under these circumstances, I hope the House, when the question before us is one impeaching the character of our Constitution, will hesitate—that it will sanction no step that has a tendency to democracy, but that it will maintain the ordered state of free England in which we live.

REFORM BILL, March 18, 1867.<sup>1</sup>

[On the death of Lord Palmerston, in 1865, and the formation of the Russell Government, with Mr. Gladstone as leader of the House of Commons, it became evident that Parliamentary Reform, which had smouldered through the peaceful administration of the great Tory-Whig minister, would again become a burning question and be set upon a candlestick. In the session of 1866 the ministry introduced a measure which, after some narrow escapes, was carried into Committee, only however, to fall a victim to an amendment proposed by Lord Dunkellin substituting 'rateable value' for 'clear yearly value' as the basis for the borough franchise. This amendment was opposed by the Government, who were defeated by a majority of 11, in a House of 619.

In consequence of this vote Lord Russell resigned office, and Lord Derby received the Queen's commands to form a Ministry, and, for the third time, entrusted the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Leadership of the House of Commons to Mr. Disraeli.

It was now resolved in the session of 1867 to attempt a final settlement of this vexatious question. It was decided in the first instance to proceed by resolutions; and a series of thirteen resolutions, embodying certain general principles which Parliament was requested to accept as the basis of legislation, was after long and careful consideration agreed to by the Cabinet, and laid before the House of Commons. In explaining the reasons which had induced the Government to adopt this method, Mr. Disraeli dwelt on the fact that five Governments in succession had tried to settle the question, and had all failed in consequence of the opposition of the House of Commons: an opposition, nevertheless, which had not caused the question to disappear, or relieved other Governments from the necessity of dealing with it. Lord Palmerston was pledged to a Reform Bill when he went out in 1858. By keeping the question alive, and yet refusing to allow it to be settled, the House of Commons had incurred a very grave responsibility, and one which justified the Government in asking

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

the House itself to take the matter in hand, and say beforehand what would and what would not satisfy it. Five Governments had failed in consequence of Parliamentary opposition. Let Parliament, therefore, which would allow no one party to carry a Bill, carry one itself, and cease to act like the dog in the manger on the subject. The Liberal party, however, shrank from a step which would have committed them to the support of the measure on all essential points, and barred them from any opposition serious enough to overthrow the Government. The resolutions were accordingly withdrawn; and no alternative remained but to proceed by Bill. The Cabinet, however, was divided on the subject, Lord Derby, Mr. Disraeli, and the majority being in favour of a measure which the two leaders of the party had long had under consideration: while Lords Cranborne and Carnarvon and General Peel considered that it went too far. In deference to their opinions, and to avert their resignation, a measure of a different character was devised, and subsequently submitted to the House. The unwonted depression under which Mr. Disraeli was labouring while discharging what to him was a very unwelcome duty was perceptible to every one; and he had at one time tendered his own resignation rather than undertake it. The ministry, however, found their new position untenable. The measure was stillborn. Their own followers demanded the original scheme. The resignation of the dissentients was accepted, and on March 18, 1867, the memorable Bill was introduced.]

THE Chancellor of the Exchequer; Sir, I rise to ask leave to introduce a Bill further to amend the laws for regulating the representation of the people in Parliament. Sir, the principles of political representation, and especially as applied to the circumstances of this country, have of late years been so profoundly and so extensively discussed and investigated that it is scarcely necessary on this occasion that I should advert to them. I propose, therefore, to confine my observations to two points. I will endeavour, in the first place, clearly to convey to the House the object of the Government in the Bill which I am asking leave to introduce; and, secondly, I will detail the means by which that purpose, in their opinion, can be accomplished. It will be for the House, first, to decide whether that object is desirable, and, secondly, if desirable, whether the means which we propose are adequate; and, in the first place, I would say that our object is, not only to maintain, but to

strengthen the character and functions of this House. They are peculiar; not only rare, but perhaps unexampled in any other popular assembly which has existed. The House of Commons has combined national representation with the attributes of a senate. That peculiar union has, in our opinion, been owing to the variety of elements of which it is formed. Its variety of character has given to it its deliberative power, and it owes to its deliberative power its general authority. We wish, I repeat, not only to maintain, but to strengthen that character and those functions; and we believe that, in the present age, and under the existing circumstances of the country, the best way to do so is to establish them on a broad popular basis.

I know that there are some persons in whose minds the epithet which I have just used may create a feeling of distrust; but I attribute the sentiment of alarm which is associated with it to a misapprehension of its meaning, and to that perplexity of ideas which too often confounds popular privileges with democratic rights. They are not identical: they are not similar. More than that; they are contrary. Popular privileges are consistent with a state of society in which there is great inequality of conditions. Democratic rights, on the contrary, demand that there should be equality of conditions as the fundamental basis of the society which they regulate. Now, that is, I think, a distinction which ought to be borne in mind by the House in dealing with the provisions of the Bill which I am about to ask leave to introduce. If this Bill be a proposal that Her Majesty shall be enabled to concede to her subjects with the advice and concurrence of her Parliament a liberal measure of popular privileges, then there may be many of its provisions which will be regarded as prudent, wise, and essentially constitutional. If, on the other hand, it be looked upon as a measure having for its object to confer democratic rights, then I admit much that it may contain may be viewed in the light of being indefensible and unjust. We do not, however, live—and I trust it will never be the fate of this country to live—under a democracy. The propositions which I am going to make to-night certainly have no tendency in that

direction. Generally speaking, I would say that, looking to what has occurred since the Reform Act of 1832 was passed—to the increase of population, the progress of industry, the spread of knowledge, and our ingenuity in the arts—we are of opinion that numbers, thoughts and feelings have since that time been created which it is desirable should be admitted within the circle of the Constitution. We wish that admission to take place in the spirit of our existing institutions, and with a due deference to the traditions of an ancient State.

In dealing with the question of the distribution of power in such a State—which is really the question before us—I would, in the first place, call the attention of the House to that part of it which is perhaps the most important, and which certainly to the greatest extent commands the interest of the public. I allude to the franchise and especially that which would prevail in towns. I would ask the House at the outset to consider the principles upon which the occupation franchise in boroughs ought to rest, and upon which it is expedient to base it. In 1832 the borough franchise was founded on the principle of value. Those who paid 10*l.* for the house in which they lived, subject to certain regulations as regards rates and residence, had the borough franchise conferred upon them. I believe that franchise may be fairly considered as having been an efficient and satisfactory franchise, and as having in its generation operated with advantage to the country. My own opinion from the commencement has always been that seed was sown in that arrangement which would necessarily in the course of time lead to some disturbance. That is, however, a question of controversy, and I will not indulge in controversy at the present moment. It is, nevertheless, an historic fact that only twenty years after the passing of the great measure of 1832 the principal, or at least one of the principal authors of that measure announced in this House that the arrangement which had been entered into, especially with respect to the borough franchise, was no longer satisfactory, and invited us to consider a new arrangement which might command a more complete assent. That is a fact which cannot be denied.

The proposition which was made at the period to which I

refer, in order to allay discontent and meet the requirements of the time by the statesman who, upon the whole, had taken nearly the most prominent part in the passing of the Act of 1832, involved a diminution of the value on which the borough franchise was established. That proposition was received with no satisfaction, and from that period up to the present—and fifteen years have, I think, since elapsed—the question has more or less engaged public attention, and has been taken up by public men who have brought forward various schemes with a view to the solution of the difficulties by which it is surrounded. All these schemes have in their turn proved to be unsatisfactory, and all have been unsuccessful; but every one of them has been distinguished by this characteristic, that the only remedy proposed was a diminution in some form or another, or in some degree or another, of the value on which the borough franchise was based in 1832. The House will easily recall to its recollection the combination of figures which have been submitted to the notice of Parliament on this subject. We had before us 8*l.* and 7*l.* rating or rental; 6*l.* in every form; and we now hear of other figures. No proposition, however, which has as yet been put forward has given satisfaction, because the country and the House, reflecting the feeling of the country, have felt that by none of the changes suggested was a settlement of the question likely to be insured. Last year a Bill was introduced with the same object as that which I have risen to ask for leave to bring in to-night—namely, to amend the laws for the representation of the people in Parliament. That Bill was avowedly not founded on a principle; it was avowedly founded, as far as I can understand, on expediency. The right honourable gentleman who was its powerful advocate in this House seemed to me always distinctly to have laid it down, in the course of his argument on the subject, that it was necessary there should be an admission of the working classes into the constituencies; that in accordance with a figure which he had fixed upon, he calculated that a certain portion of them would be admitted, but that if another figure which he named were adopted he thought the number admitted would be excessive, and he therefore recommended

the first figure as that which upon the whole would, he thought, furnish the best and safest solution of the difficulty. His proposal, therefore, involved no principle. It might have been an appropriate arrangement, but it was essentially an expedient.

The House knows what took place during the long discussions in which we were engaged last year. I infer from that cheer that the House is prepared to recognise the truth of the statement that it was generally felt that the proposal of the late Government afforded no prospect of a satisfactory settlement of this question. A very considerable amount of time was last session employed in a very unsatisfactory manner, until at last the House took the matter into its own hands, and, in one of the largest divisions which ever took place within these walls, asserted a principle with regard to the borough franchise which was carried by a majority. That principle was that the borough franchise should be founded on rating. The House will admit that the statement I have made is fair and accurate. No one questions for a moment that the Government fully realised the importance of that decision. Of course, if they had not acknowledged its importance, they would not have retired from a position of power; but they felt that the decision at which the House of Commons had arrived was one opposed to the whole policy which they had pursued during the session. I do not say that every gentleman on both sides of the House who contributed to that division—I do not say that everyone in a division which numbered above 600 members, had narrowly investigated and pursued to the last consequences all that must follow from the assertion and adoption of that principle; but it happened, as happens in all popular assemblies, that a great decision was arrived at by the unerring instinct of the House. The House felt that for the last fifteen years this question of the borough franchise had not been treated in a satisfactory manner by any Government which had attempted to deal with it, and that the time had come when some principle should be laid down in a distinct and decided manner for the guidance of those who might have to offer propositions to the House on the subject.

I take it for granted that if ever there was a decision of the House of Commons which meant something it was that decision



which determined the fate of the ministry; and if anything ever had the character of authority in this House at all, it was the vote arrived at on that occasion. The House, I assume, meant by the decision it arrived at that the person who was to be intrusted with a vote to elect members of Parliament should be one with respect to whom there should be some guarantee and security for the regularity of his life and the general trustworthiness of his conduct, and the House thought that the fact of a man being rated to the relief of the poor and being able to pay his rates gave that fair assurance which the State had a right to require. I take it that the vote of the House of Commons meant this:—If you are going to invest men with the exercise of public rights, let that great trust be accompanied with the exercise of public duty. I take it for granted that was what the House of Commons meant. It meant that the being rated to the poor, and the paying of the rates, constituted a fair assurance that the man who fulfilled those conditions was one likely to be characterised by regularity of life and general trustworthiness of conduct. That is a principle which the House thought ought not to be lost sight of, but should be a *sine quâ non* in the settlement of the borough franchise. In having to consider this question, we accepted as a guide that decision of the House of Commons, placing on it what we deemed to be its real interpretation. We believe that the House has resolved and wishes that the borough suffrage should be bound up and united with the duty of paying rates for the maintenance of the poor, and paying them really; that in fact a *bonâ fide* rating franchise is what the House of Commons meant by the resolution it adopted. Accepting the decision of the House with that interpretation, we had to consider how such a proposition could be united with the principle of value, which hitherto was and still is the law of the country with respect to the borough franchise, and which without exception during all the discussions on the subject for the last fifteen years has been accepted by Parliament.

The result of this attempt was not satisfactory. In accepting a real and genuine principle of rating as a basis, we found, the moment we endeavoured to connect it with value, disturb-

ing elements, which promised no prospect of solution, and gave no chance of permanency. Therefore, under these circumstances, in the course of consideration we proposed to ourselves to examine the whole question of occupation in boroughs, and see what would be the effect of the application of the principle of genuine rating without reference to value. Let me call the attention of the House to some figures, which will be in the hands of members immediately and in greater detail. There are in the boroughs of England and Wales 1,367,000 male householders, of whom there are at present qualified to vote 644,000. There would therefore remain unqualified 723,000. In applying the principle of a franchise founded on being rated to the poor, and on personal payment of the rates, we found that out of these 723,000 now disqualified, or rather not qualified, for voting under the existing law, we should at once have had to take away 237,000—that is to say, that beneath the 10*l.* line which now qualifies there are 237,000 persons who are rated to the poor and who pay rates, and who if the law were so changed that value should not be an element would then be qualified to vote for members of Parliament. Now, if you add these 237,000 persons who are rated to the poor, and who pay their rates, to the 644,000 who are at present qualified you will find that there would be 881,000 persons, fulfilling the required conditions—that is to say, almost exactly two-thirds of the whole of the householders in the boroughs of England and Wales. There would still remain 486,000 who would not be qualified under these circumstances, because they do not pay rates personally. A great deduction must be made from those 486,000 on account of persons who might claim to pay the rates; but a great amount of those 486,000 persons would still remain without the opportunity of being rated to the poor, because there are certain Acts of Parliament, some of a general and some of a local character, by which the landlord compounds for the rates of his tenants, who, in consequence are called compound-householders, and most of these are under the operation of the Act with the details of which every gentleman in the House is familiar—the Small Tenements Act. There are fifty-eight boroughs which are entirely under

the operation of that Act, and there are ninety-eight boroughs in which certain parishes only are under the operation of the Act.

In considering the settlement of the franchise for boroughs and the possibility of attempting to establish it, not on the fluctuating principle of value, which is only a question of degree, which may vary, and which we might be called on to change from year to year, it is impossible not to take into view the peculiar position of the compound-householders. And the question arises, Ought a compound householder to have a vote? Well, Sir, in our opinion, assuming that the House is of the same opinion, that the foundation of the franchise should be rating and a payment of rates, and that that is adopted by the House, not as a check, as some would say, but on the contrary, as a qualification, and because it is the best evidence of the trustworthiness of the individual, we have no hesitation in saying ourselves that we do not think that the compound-householder, as a compound-householder, ought to have a vote. But, Sir, we are far from saying that any person who is a compound-householder from the effects of Acts which have been passed for the convenience of vestries should be deprived of the opportunity of obtaining and enjoying this right which persons in the same sphere of life may have granted to them, and which, for aught we know, these compound-householders may be equally competent to possess and to exercise. And, therefore, Sir, we should have to consider whether it would not be possible, in the case of compound-householders who are deprived of rating for the moment by Acts to which I have referred, either of a general or local character—whether it might not be possible to give them the opportunity of accepting the public duty, and in consequence the public right, which others in the same sphere of life, and influenced in their conduct by the same conditions of existence, might possess; and taking this general view of the question, seeing the impossibility of settling it on any principle connected with value, and that it is only by taking the rating principle in its completeness and authenticity that you can get one on which you can rest a perfect settlement, our opinion

is—and we shall make that proposition to the House—that we should establish the franchise in the boroughs on this principle, that any man who has occupied a house for two years, and been rated to the relief of the poor, and pays his rates—every householder under these conditions should enjoy the borough franchise. By that means the 237,000 persons who are now rated and pay their rates would, of course, be at once qualified. But with regard to the compound-householders, we propose that every facility should be given to them—that they shall be allowed to enter their names upon the rate-book, to fulfil the constitutional condition to which I have adverted, and then they will, of course, succeed to the constitutional right which is connected with it. Sir, if we pursue that course you have your borough franchise fixed upon principle; you know where you are; you know that the power of electing members of Parliament must be exercised by men who, by their position in life, have shown that they are qualified for its exercise. And meeting the difficulty of compound-householders by the provisions which are in the Bill, and which will give them every facility to claim the exercise of the same right on condition of fulfilling the same duty, the whole of the 723,000 householders in the boroughs of England that are at present not qualified to vote for members of Parliament will be qualified by the Bill I am asking leave to introduce. Nor will there be a man among them who, if he deserves the franchise, may not possess it.

Now, Sir, I have heard many observations made on this question of compound-householders, but the arguments, though plausible, amount only to this—those who wish that compound-householders should not qualify themselves for a vote upon the constitutional condition which we propose as a means by which the right should be obtained really, in fact, make one assumption on which all their remarks are founded; and that is this, that the working classes of this country are so little interested in the possession and exercise of the suffrage that they will not take the slightest trouble in order to avail themselves of it and possess it. Well, that may be the opinion of those who make such observations, but it is not the opinion

of Her Majesty's ministers. We believe that the feeling of the great body of the people on this subject is very different; that it is a feeling very likely to increase in this country, and that the conditions which we have laid down as those which should qualify a householder in a borough for a vote are consistent with the security of society, and are at the same time conditions which would be agreeable to the mind of every industrious man of integrity. Now, Sir, I may recapitulate to the House for a moment the figures we have to deal with, because such vague assertions are made in the absence of correct statistics of voting and of householders that it is well that the House should bear them in mind. There are, as I have said, 1,367,000 male householders in the boroughs of England, and at the present moment 644,000 of them are qualified.

Mr. Bright: May I ask the right honourable gentleman whether these houses include warehouses and shops?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer: They are houses—dwelling-houses. I am referring to the male occupiers of dwelling-houses. Of the remaining 723,000, if the House accedes to the Bill I have to introduce, 237,000, now rated to the relief of the poor and paying their rates, would immediately be qualified to vote; and in the case of the 486,000 who are compound-householders, facilities would be afforded to them, if they chose, of claiming their vote—that is to say, of inserting their names in the rate-book and paying their rates, and then they also, as a matter of course, will succeed to the enjoyment of the right. Well, Sir, that appears to me to be the only solid foundation upon which you can settle this question of the borough franchise. I have heard nothing which gives me any hope that any other plan can be offered which involves at the same time the principle that society has a right to ask that the person who exercises the suffrage is not a migratory pauper; and as regards settlement, I can see no satisfactory settlement unless you lay down the principle that every householder who fulfils the constitutional conditions to which I have adverted proves himself one qualified for the possession and exercise of such a trust; unless you take that settlement I can see no chance of this question being ever settled. Now, Sir, there is

a plan which I am told at this moment is popular among certain persons. Indeed, there are a great many plans, both as regards the suffrage, distribution of seats, and other matters, which I have no doubt will come before the consideration of the House, and when they do it will be very much for the advantage of those who introduce them to our notice, for I believe these subjects never can be better understood than after a discussion in the House of Commons. But there is a plan, I am told, popular with some persons, and which is held forth as a more satisfactory settlement of this question than the one I have proposed on the part of the Government, and that is what is called the 5*l.* rating—that the suffrage should be established on a 5*l.* rating.

Now, Sir, I must say, having had very much to consider these questions, I know of no Serbonian bog deeper than a 5*l.* rating would prove to be. Just let the House see how it stands. In the present state of the law, as I shall show to the House, if the interpretation we have placed on the great vote of last year be a sound one—and if it be not a sound one it proves the House of Commons was trifling with the question—there really is no such thing as a 5*l.* rating; you let in a very large and very indiscriminate number to the enjoyment of the right without the preliminary performance of duties, and when they are let in you leave a great many behind them who, because others are let in, immediately cry out to be admitted. Then where is your settlement? There is no more reason why a 5*l.* rating should give a qualification than one of 4*l.* But then I am told that this great difficulty is to be entirely overcome by a violent change to be effected in the law of England. Nominal 5*l.* raters are to be turned into *bonâ fide* 5*l.* raters by the operation of the law, and no Englishman who pays less than that sum is to enjoy the privilege of voting. All below that line are, in fact, to be taken out of the sphere of self-government, and deprived of the opportunity which the humblest now possesses, and would possess under the plan we propose, of performing public duties, and consequently of obtaining public rights. I can imagine no scheme more injurious—I may say, more fatal—than a proposition of this kind; and it seems to me that, if

we were to adopt it, manhood suffrage would be the logical and necessary consequence, and that every man who finds that he is in a position in which he may not be permitted to fulfil a constitutional condition which may give him a constitutional right would naturally fall back into the arms of the lowest agitators, and feel that his only chance of ever obtaining the rights of constitutional citizenship would be by a process which has not hitherto been recognised by any authority in this country. I have now expressed to the House, as far as the occupation in boroughs is concerned, upon what principle we recommend the borough franchise to be founded. It would make at once 237,000 persons qualified for the suffrage, and would allow all who were not rated before to avail themselves of the right, and so, if they chose, to become electors.

But it is said, and it has been said by a very high authority—one for whom I have a great personal regard and respect, although, considering what a high authority he is, I think he sometimes makes, especially with regard to his opponents, very reckless remarks—that the plan of the Government, with which that high authority, at the time he said it, was really unacquainted, and for which he might have waited, was an assault upon the rights and power of the middle classes. It is certainly not the intention of Her Majesty's Government to introduce a measure which shall make such an assault. Her Majesty's Government are anxious that on the one hand the aristocracy and on the other hand the working classes shall have their due share in the Parliamentary constitution of the country; but they recognise with sincerity the extreme expediency of the principle that the influence of the middle classes of the country should not be diminished. The Government look to the steady virtues of those classes to exercise a right bias on the constitution of the country, and they believe that the authority which those classes obtained in a great degree under the Act of 1832 has been exercised wisely, worthily, and to the advantage of the country at large. But if there be, by the proposition which I have to make, any chance such as has been intimated by this great authority, why I think that we meet it by a proposition to institute a franchise founded on a most popular

principle, and one of which the middle classes must largely partake—that is, the franchise founded on the payment of direct taxation. We propose that every person in England who pays 20s. a year direct taxation shall possess a vote.

Mr. Gladstone: Whether he be a compound-householder or not?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer: Everybody who pays 20s. annually in direct taxation shall have a vote. Thus we build up the constituency which would establish the franchise in the boroughs upon two great principles—the payment of direct taxation, and the payment of rates. But it has been urged that the enjoyment of this franchise, founded upon the payment of direct taxes is one which would not be enjoyed as intended in a great degree by the class whose influence it is said our proposition may assail: that is to say, that most of them are householders, and therefore they would not enjoy this franchise. Therefore, we meet that objection by proposing that a person who pays 20s. direct taxation, and who enjoys the franchise which depends upon the payment of direct taxation, if he is also a householder and pays his rates, may exercise his suffrage in respect of both qualifications.

Mr. Gladstone: I wish to ask a question very material to the complete understanding of this subject, and that is, whether a compound-householder not paying his own rates, but paying direct taxes to the requisite amount, will have a vote in respect of the payment of direct taxation?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer: He would, of course, have a vote in respect of the franchise which he enjoys as a payer of direct taxation, and if he chose to pay his rates in addition, then he would have two votes. Now, Sir, before I give to the House a general summary of the result of these franchises upon the borough constituency, there are yet some other franchises with which the House is familiar, but which I again wish to recommend to its consideration.

Mr. Roebuck: Will the right honourable gentleman explain what he means by direct taxation?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer: I mean the payment of income-tax and assessed taxes. But I wish to observe that it



will not include the qualification which was so humorously referred to by an honourable gentleman the other night, because it will not include anything which is paid under licences of any description. There are other franchises which we also propose. The House is already acquainted with them, and although they are not of vast importance, still I think they are founded upon right principles, and I hope the House will candidly consider them. The vote which we wish to found upon the possession of 50*l.* property in the funds or of 50*l.* in savings banks constitutes property qualifications of this character: that is to say, we will give to small holders of personal property the same privileges which the small holders of real property have; and, as a man possessed of a 40*s.* freehold has a vote, we think that the person who has an equivalent property of a personal character should also have a vote. We think that by this means a vote would be intrusted to a body of persons, belonging chiefly to the working classes, who would exercise the privilege to the advantage of the country. Then there is the educational franchise. It has been said that if you introduce a suffrage founded upon the payment of direct taxation that it would supply means for exercising the vote to those persons who otherwise would have it under the educational franchise. To a certain degree there is truth in that; but having taken some pains to investigate what would be the operation of such a franchise, I am bound to say that there are many persons in whose condition the House would be deeply interested, some of whom would not have any opportunity, either as householders—and this would be peculiarly the case in counties—or as payers of direct taxation, of exercising the suffrage, but who are peculiarly qualified to exercise such a trust. Among others, the position of ministers of religion is very remarkable. I am speaking of ministers of all sects. I find that men who entirely devote their lives to solace or to elevate the sense of existence are men who under this franchise would exercise, and I think admirably exercise, a certain degree of political influence, but who, either as householders or as payers of income-tax especially to the amount of 20*s.* would certainly be debarred from the franchise. I there-

fore trust that the House will allow these three franchises to pass.

I do not think that it is our business to act the part of electioneering agents, and to make estimates, always of a most speculative character, of the number of persons who will vote under the plan we propose. That is not our business as ministers in Parliament. We are to see who, under the laws of this country, are to have the opportunity of acquiring a vote. And allow me to remind the House of the nature of the arguments which are always used by those who are the promoters of increased suffrage. They are always founded upon the number of the population. But the business of the House of Commons in proposing or in passing laws upon this subject is to ascertain as far as possible the number who will be admitted under the particular measure. They are not to estimate a thing which, after all, can only be done in a speculative manner—the number who may be tempted, in consequence of the passing of the Bill, to register their suffrages. Their business is simply to pass those laws which they think will conduce to the welfare or safety of the country. Well, I will say that if this Bill be carried there is not a man—whether he be a rate-payer paying a rental of less than 10*l.*, or a compound-householder who may not qualify himself if he choose. In the new boroughs to which I will afterwards advert the estimated number of voters will be 68,000. The number of direct tax-payers who would probably vote in boroughs will be very considerable. The public departments have no means of offering to the House any recent information upon this subject, and it would probably take months to obtain any. Making due allowance, however, for the increased property and assessed taxes—probably at the rate of 23 per cent.—since Mr. Macaulay's returns were made to the House, I should think that the number who would qualify in boroughs would greatly exceed 200,000. (Mr. Gladstone: From direct taxes?) Yes, from direct taxes. The educational franchise would in the boroughs give 35,000 voters, the fundholders' franchise 25,000, and the savings bank franchise 45,000. You would thus have more than 100,000 voters who could qualify themselves in the boroughs for the exercise of the franchise. It has

been said that they will not choose to avail themselves of the great right. I regret to hear that opinion, but I venture to doubt its correctness. But still, whatever may be our opinion, it is the duty of the House so to deal with this question that those whom they believe to be qualified for the exercise of this privilege shall have that opportunity, and the duty of Parliament ceases when that has been accomplished.

I will now proceed to consider the question of the county franchise. We propose that these new suffrages shall be extended to the counties; but in consequence of the great difference which prevails between counties and boroughs we do not propose under any circumstances that any person should exercise the privilege of voting twice. I now come to the consideration of the amount of the occupation in counties. When I last made some observations to the House upon this subject, I stated that Her Majesty's Government thought, on the whole, that the county qualifications had better be placed at 20*l.* rating. When I made that statement I made it with a feeling on the part of the Government that the opinion of the House of Commons ought to be consulted upon the subject, and because, also, they believed that the House had never had the opportunity of arriving at any decided opinion upon the matter. The question was really never put fairly before the House. When the honourable member for Surrey and others came forward with propositions to reduce the occupation franchise for counties to 10*l.* the House was always asked to consider those propositions in an isolated manner. Now, we thought (and I believe that the House has been long of the same opinion) that this question ought to be considered in conjunction with those of analogous character, and ought not to be treated in a isolated manner. They depend upon each other, and I look upon all those attempts to reduce the county franchise as barren of results; and, as a proof of the correctness of that opinion, I may remark that they have been barren of consequences. No one ever felt that a satisfactory settlement would be likely to result from those debates. Last year there was an opportunity when the Reform Bill was before the House; when the mind of the House was accustomed to consider in all

its details, and in all its ramifications, the principles of Parliamentary representation—there was, I say, at that time a fair opportunity for discussing this question in a satisfactory manner, and for arriving at a satisfactory settlement. But this subject, always unfortunate, was never more unfortunate than on that occasion, because a great party scene and division took place at the beginning of the evening destined for its discussion.<sup>1</sup> It was brought on in a languid House—in a very thin House. It was decided, I grant, in a very full House; but it was discussed in an unsatisfactory and feeble manner. My opinion is a perfectly impartial one, for I myself took part in the debate. The division was taken in a full House, and the majority was only a very slight one, but the question was decided upon a principle which the result of the session showed was not the conviction of the House of Commons. Well, if the House of Commons meant anything else, it meant that rating should be the principle of the franchise, and I believe that that decision has been received by the country as one of the soundest at which the House of Commons ever arrived.

Well, Sir, we should have been glad if the question had been calmly and completely discussed; and at whatever opinion the House of Commons had arrived, we should have accepted that opinion as a wise and a sound one. In endeavouring, however, to bring forward a complete measure, and as far as we can to offer a definite and definitive position to the consideration of the House, Her Majesty's Government gave much attention to this question of the county occupation franchise; and, on the whole, they believe that the qualification that would be most advantageous and most satisfactory would be a 15% rating, and that is the amount at which they are determined to fix it. That would qualify 171,000 additional householders for the exercise of the franchise. The savings bank franchise will give 40,000; the fundholders' franchise 25,000; and the educational franchise 44,000 voters. A very large number, exceeding 150,000, will vote in virtue of the payment of direct taxes. No doubt many of these would possess double

<sup>1</sup> Reference to Lord Dunkellin's amendment in favour of a rating franchise, carried against Government, June 18, 1866, by a majority of eleven.

qualifications, but there will still be an addition to the county franchise of upwards of 300,000 voters.

I have now occupied the attention of the House with a subject which I am afraid is at no time entertaining, and which, when the conclusions have been to some extent foregone, must possess less attraction than ever; but I have placed before the House, I hope, with some clearness, the proposal of the Government. There is another part of the subject of very great interest, on which, although to-day I am anxious to touch upon nothing but what is necessary, it is requisite that I should make some observations, and that is the distribution of seats. Now, Sir, that is a question that very greatly interests the public mind, and I know there are members on both sides of the House who take a very deep interest in it. The proposition which I made upon a previous occasion has been described as quite inadequate to the occasion and to the circumstances in which the country is placed; and we have heard that it is an insufficient response to the demands of the public voice. I am perfectly ready to meet those objections, though I have no desire upon an occasion such as this to invite controversy, for I have no doubt there will be opportunities hereafter for entering upon matters of detail.

It is said that there should be a much larger scheme of disfranchisement; that at the very least every town of 10,000 inhabitants or less should lose a member, and some say we should even go further than that. We are also told that a third member should be given to many places, and thus, by a process of disfranchisement and cumulative votes, at last a perfect representation of the people would be accomplished. We have given that subject the great consideration which it deserves. My own opinion is that the votaries of this new system are not very numerous in the country, and I doubt whether they are very numerous in this House; but its advocates are, no doubt, in many cases men of distinguished ability and high character, and persons whose opinions upon any public subject will command and demand attention. But whatever may be the number of those persons who advocate three-cornered constituencies and cumulative voting, there is

no doubt that a very great noise has been made by them. I am willing to admit that, as far as the articles and the letters in the newspapers are concerned, the question is settled ; but I have always thought that those articles and letters—I do not wish to speak slightly of them, for I have written leading articles for newspapers myself—have one distinguishing characteristic, and that is that they always assume there is only one side of a question ; but their writers are wise in their generation, because if they did not act on that assumption, nobody at the moment would read their productions. As, then, the question of three-cornered constituencies and cumulative votes has been brought before the consideration of the House, I, and others who are near me, will meet the question frankly and fully.

The House will not, I am sure, permit the introduction of any controversial matter upon the present occasion, but it has a right to hear the opinions of the Government upon a question ; and therefore I say that, having considered the matter without prejudice, and having completely and thoroughly tested it at every point, and tried it in every quarter, our opinion is that the scheme is erroneous in equity, and would be so in practice. Sir, there are only two courses to follow if you wish to improve the representation of the people by a redistribution of seats ; there is no middle course. You must either create a new electoral map of England, or you must deal practically with the circumstances before you, and follow the line to which I at this moment refer, and which I think the Government has followed. With regard to the proposition that there should be a complete revision of the representative system of the country as far as electoral localities are concerned, if I may be presumed to give advice to the House of Commons, I would say, Do not make that a question to be settled by a Parliamentary majority, or accepted on the authority of any ministry whatever. It is a subject too vast and too deep for us to treat of and deal with without preliminary investigation conducted by persons of the highest standing, and character, and experience, and learning in the country. When in possession of the result of their accumulated knowledge, and of their mature thought and great experience a popular assembly might weigh their opinions, and a

practical ministry might embody their resolutions. There is no other means by which you can deal with this proposition ; but if you are not of opinion that the electoral map of England should be reconstructed, then you must proceed prudently and practically ; you must inquire what unrepresented places ought fairly speaking to be represented, and you ought not to lose the opportunity then offered of giving the teeming multitudes of the counties as far as you can that direct representation which they want, and which, indirectly, I admit, they possess. These are the two practical points which you ought to have before you. There is no medium between dealing with the whole question in a vast and solemn manner by means adequate for the settlement of so great a matter, and the prudent practical method which I mentioned.

Well, Sir, we are not prepared to take the first course, although I do not say it is unworthy of deep and respectful consideration ; we therefore propose to follow the second, and we have found towns in this country which we think ought to be represented, and whose representatives would bring fresh vigour to the House. The population of the counties, invigorated and vivified with the new franchises which you are giving it, will demand direct representation in this House, and you ought to move in that direction as far as you can, so that counties may no longer be said to be represented only indirectly by small boroughs. I am of opinion that this may be done without any very serious disturbance of your representative system. Whatever you do, your representation must be fairly distributed over the country ; if you give a greater preponderance to one part at the expense of another you create two nations ; there will be a want of sympathy and cordiality between the parts, and you will in fact be going back to the principles of the Heptarchy. Although I have read the names of the places we propose to enfranchise before, with one exception, I think it becoming to repeat them, with the addition of the place that before was wanting. We propose, then, that by the thirty seats that will be obtained by the process of disfranchisement we shall give a representative to Hartlepool, Darlington, Burnley, Staleybridge, St. Helen's, Dewsbury, Barnsley, Middlesborough, Wednesbury,

Croydon, Gravesend, and Torquay, and two to the Tower Hamlets. In respect to the counties, we propose to divide North Lancashire, North Lincolnshire, West Kent, East Surrey, Middlesex, South Staffordshire, and South Devon, and give them two members each; and dividing South Lancashire also, we propose to give it an additional member. We also propose to give a seat to the London University.

I have placed before the House the principal features of the Bill which I am asked to introduce. The Bill itself will be in the hands of the members to-morrow, and then they will be perfectly well qualified to form an opinion upon the manner in which the principles I have laid down are acted on. I hope that the House will candidly consider this measure. As far as we are concerned, we have spared no pains, no thought, and have not shrunk from what was more important, perhaps, in endeavouring to bring it before the House. I will not advert unnecessarily to the circumstances attending the framing of this measure, which has now been brought before the House of Commons, under very great difficulties and at very great sacrifices. I do not wish to disguise that I have felt great chagrin and great mortification in connection with what has taken place; but I believe I have done my duty, and under the circumstances I do not think I could have done other than I have. In attempting to bring the question to this point we have lost those whose absence from our councils we more than regret; we have had to appeal to a high-spirited party to make what no doubt to some was to a certain extent a sacrifice of principle, much sacrifice of sentiment, and much sacrifice of interest. But we have not appealed in vain, because the members of that party were animated by the same feeling which influenced us—a sense of duty and conviction. They felt that the time had arrived when this question must be dealt with and settled extensively and completely. I hope, therefore, the House of Commons will give this measure a fair and candid consideration. We believe it is one which, if adopted in spirit, will settle its long differences; and that it is qualified to meet the requirements of the country. I am told for certain that there are objections against it; but I beg to remind the House of the



distinction which we draw between popular privileges and democratic rights. I am told that in this measure there are checks and counterpoises in our scheme. We live under a Constitution of which we boast that it is a Constitution of checks and counterpoises. If the measure bears some reference to existing classes in this country, why should we conceal from ourselves, or omit from our discussions, the fact that this country is a country of classes, and a country of classes it will ever remain? What we desire to do is to give everyone who is worthy of it a fair share in the government of the country by means of the elective franchise ; but, at the same time, we have been equally anxious to maintain the character of the House, to make propositions in harmony with the circumstances of the country, to prevent a preponderance of any class, and to give a representation to the nation.

SECOND READING, March 26, 1867.<sup>1</sup>

[The second reading of the Bill was taken on March 25; and at midnight on the 26th Mr. Disraeli rose to answer the various objections which had been raised to it. This speech was considered at the time to be one of his greatest efforts. 'With no other notes to assist him than a few which he had jotted down in the course of the second night's debate, Mr. Disraeli nevertheless summed up the whole case to his audience with that exhaustion of detail, and that powerful grasp of general principles which are seldom found united even after elaboration and with the aid of the most abundant references.'—*'Day,'*<sup>2</sup> March 29, 1867.]

SIR, the honourable member for Birmingham commenced his speech with his usual protest, a protest against gentlemen on this side of the House presuming to deal with a Liberal monopoly. As long as the honourable gentleman and his friends were allowed to remain the only ameliorators of the condition of the people, so long we received from the honourable gentleman all those encouragements which in his milder moments he knows how to employ. But I have myself always protested against the opinions of the honourable gentleman on this subject. I hold that we have a full constitutional right to deal by any means we think best with the question, to endeavour to improve the representation of the people in this House of Commons, and I would assert that right at all times in spite of the dogmas of the honourable member for Birmingham. The

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

<sup>2</sup> The *Day* was a newspaper representing the views of those independent Liberals who gave a general support to the Bill. They acquired the name of the 'Cave' from a witticism of Mr. Bright, who likened them to the dwellers in the Cave of Adullam. The chief among them were Earl Grosvenor, Lord Elcho, Colonel Anson, and Lord Lichfield.

honourable gentleman tells us to-night that I, on the part of the Government, have brought in a Bill which is full of false pretences, imputing to me statements which I never made, and opinions which I have never professed. But how easy is it to show the utter fallacy and want of foundation for the statements which the honourable gentleman has made. The honourable gentleman said: 'You made a statement which left the House under the impression that you were giving a large amount of enfranchisement to the people.' The statement I made must be still fresh in the recollection of the House, and what did I say? I said if the measure which I proposed were passed, if all the persons now under 10*l.* line were rated to the poor and paid their rates, 240,000 men would be qualified to avail themselves of the franchise if they complied with the constitutional conditions which I explained. Now, what happened? Why, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, no doubt well informed—Well, I hope the words are not prophetic. But the right honourable gentleman, no doubt well informed, but acting, as I am sure, entirely under a misapprehension, having imputed to me that I made a statement that 240,000 men would be added to the constituency—which is not my statement; what I said was that they would be qualified—and having allowed me to correct him, afterwards reduced the number to one half; the honourable member for Birmingham has adopted that estimate, and says that only half the number will be added to the constituency. I won't impeach the accuracy of this estimate. I will suppose it to be true, and I will ask how is it that only half the number will be taken in? We know the reasons. We know that the other half are of a migratory character, are paupers, and we have evidence of that. I am not speaking now of the compound householders; I am speaking of those who are rated to the poor, and who, if they paid their rates, would be qualified by this Bill. And why, then, is this amount reduced to 150,000? Because, as I have said, they are migratory and paupers. Well then, does the honourable member for Birmingham wish that this moiety of migratory paupers should have the suffrage, or does he not? Let him answer. He knows very well that he does not wish the migratory pauper to be an elector. Well then,

what becomes of the charge that I am the advocate of exclusion, and that I bring in a Bill which shuts out one half of those who should be admitted from the right of voting? The charge is utterly shallow. Well, if it is true that you must make this deduction from the 240,000 men who are at the present moment rated to the payment of poor rates, it is equally true that the same deductions must be made from the great body of compound-householders. I never heard anybody dispute that.

The honourable member for Birmingham knows that statement is perfectly accurate; he knows well what the deductions would be and from what cause. Then, what becomes of this charge of exclusion? And what becomes of the charge that this is a revolutionary measure; for as such it is treated on one night, and then the next night we are told it is a measure of extreme restriction? Why, Sir, it is a measure founded upon principle—upon a popular and a rational principle. It is of general application, without restriction whatever; and any person who fulfils the conditions—which are conditions, as I believe, entirely approved by the great majority of the people—may possess and enjoy the suffrage of this country. Well, the subject has been very little discussed. Considering the nature of the Bill before us, and the great attendance there has always been in the House when this question has been mentioned, it is remarkable how everything like Parliamentary discussion has been as it were evaded. Why, when I asked leave to bring in the Bill, what happened? The right honourable gentleman the member for South Lancashire rose and delivered a speech or rather an invective against a measure which he had never even seen, basing many of his conclusions upon assumptions which, when he found the Bill in his hands, he saw had no foundation whatever. But if the right honourable gentleman on the motion for bringing in the Bill made a speech which was only adapted to the second reading, when the second reading is moved, instead of allowing a general discussion to take place upon it, he jumps up at once and immediately makes a speech which is only fitted for the Committee. And, Sir, if the course which the right honourable gentleman indicated last night had been followed, the discussion would have ended that evening,

and probably at a very early hour. Now, is that a fair or proper way in which to treat a question like this, which the attendance here always shows to be one deeply interesting to the House as well as to the country; and by the due discussion of which the Government introducing a measure of this character can alone obtain any accurate knowledge or cognisance of the feelings of this assembly?

The right honourable gentleman said last night in a very solemn tone that if this were a motion for the third reading of the Bill we should all agree that it would be impossible to pass it. As if that were not the fate of every Bill! As if you were on the second reading of any Bill to treat it as though it then stood for a third reading; and as if any Reform Bill, of all Bills in the world, could be proposed to be read the second time, and anyone could expect it to pass the third reading in the exact shape in which it was then presented to the House! Sir, that is not a fair criticism. And then the right honourable gentleman gets up and addresses me in a tone which I must say is very unusual in this House. Not that I at all care for the heat he displays, although really his manner is sometimes so very excited and so alarming that one might almost feel thankful that gentlemen in this House who sit on opposite sides of this table are divided by a good broad piece of furniture.<sup>1</sup> Sir, I can fairly say that I neither wish to accept the conditions of the right honourable gentleman nor to oppose them. I will always endeavour to treat this House as Her Majesty's Government are perfectly willing and anxious to do. I have certainly never supposed that we could bring any matter like this to a conclusion without the candid and cordial co-operation of the House of Commons; and it is only by discussion, by becoming acquainted with the different views of honourable members, by mutual concessions and arrangement, that any conclusion whatever on such a question can be arrived at. Well, the right honourable gentleman yesterday made a very stern appeal to me on the subject of the lodger franchise. He said that the 'lodger franchise must be conceded.' Now, I thought that was

<sup>1</sup> A reference to some gesture of impatience on the part of Mr. Stansfeld.

a very extraordinary tone in which to address one who certainly on the subject of the lodger franchise can't be supposed to have a very great prejudice against it. Indeed, if I may say so, I was myself the father of the lodger franchise. Undoubtedly I was the first minister who ever proposed its adoption by this House.

We hear a great deal of abuse of what are called the 'by-franchises' or the special franchises. We are obliged to the right honourable gentleman for giving a decent epithet to describe them after the phrases applied to them by the honourable member for Birmingham. We hear, I say, a great deal of abuse uttered against those franchises; but I believe that the opinion of the House of Commons—the opinion of the majority of the House of Commons—is in their favour; and also that the calm opinion of the country really approves them. Who is the author, who are the great patrons of all these special franchises? Why, they did not emanate from me; they did not come from this Bench. They came from the late Prime Ministers, and from coalition Chancellors of the Exchequer. There is no doubt one of these special franchises which has recommended itself to the very ardent sympathies of a great portion of the people, but which was never invented by a Whig or by a coalition minister, and it is this very lodger franchise which I am now sternly told we must concede, as if in being asked to concede that we were asked to make some enormous sacrifice. Sir, we had considerable difficulty about the lodger franchise. I will deal candidly with the House. I brought this subject before my colleagues. I do not know that any of them were particularly hostile to the lodger franchise; but of course the first objection to it is that it is inconsistent with a Bill which is founded on the principle of rating, because you can't rate a lodger. Well, that is a very important consideration, but it is not one which may not be overcome. I mean to say that my colleagues would not have been prevented by that consideration alone from entertaining the question of the lodger franchise. They said this: 'We have no prejudice on the subject, but it is inconsistent with our principle of rating.' Several members of the present cabinet were in the cabinet

which in 1859 brought forward the lodger franchise; but they said:—‘The right honourable member for South Lancashire, the leader of the Opposition, stated last year that the lodger franchise was an insignificant affair, and that he believed it would produce very small results; and if it be an insignificant affair, and if it would produce very small results, what would be the use of deviating from the principle of our Bill?’ But now we find that the lodger franchise, which a few months ago was a very insignificant affair, and could produce only very small results, is the great question of the day. These seventeen points or twenty-seven—I forget which; for I may perchance have confounded what occurred here last night with what took place at some of those meetings where what is called ‘the mob of the House of Commons’ attended, attended with the right honourable gentleman—but though there were these seventeen or twenty-seven points, this one is put forward as the first and foremost, as the one great point on which the fate of the Government is to rest; on which a secretly prepared resolution is to be moved, and on account of which we are not to be allowed to go into Committee. This is the first great cause and ‘it must be conceded.’ Sir, I dare say that the lodger franchise, if we get into Committee, will be discussed with great candour and calmness; and if it is brought forward in a shape that commends itself to the favour of the House, I have no doubt the House will adopt it.

But, says the right honourable gentleman, in the second place—and this is most important—means must be taken to prevent trafficking in the votes of the lowest class of householders. ‘Means must be adopted!’ But what means? I should like the right honourable gentleman to be more specific and to be more special on this point, as he sometimes is. Of course we are all anxious to prevent this trafficking as regards ‘the lowest class of householders’—I must be careful of the words I use—I think it would be very convenient if we could establish some means of controlling the conduct of the higher class of householders, and if I have an opportunity of bringing in our Bill for the prevention of bribery and corruption, and if I make the attempt to do that; although I am not sure, after

what has passed to-night, that it will not be opposed by the honourable member for Birmingham. But what surprises me most in this affair is the assumption of the right honourable gentleman the member for South Lancashire, that all those persons who are going to be introduced into the constituency by this Bill are anxious to be bribed. Well, a line, a magical line, is to be drawn to prevent it; as if clever vestrymen and cunning election-agents would not soon convert a 4*l.* householder into a 5*l.* householder when you have got your precious line, and so screw the figures up from year to year. But if these people are what you assume, but what I do not believe them to be, then the honourable member—who is, I will not say the great professor of manhood suffrage, but the great counsellor of those who advocate manhood suffrage—will show us that the line is the only bulwark against democracy.

I remember that some years ago when the Militia was about to be restored, the Government of the day, rather short-sightedly, determined to establish that force on the principle of the ballot; and Lord Palmerston, who had then left them and gone into Opposition, opposed it very much. The Government of the day, a Whig Government, of course containing many great statesmen and distinguished orators, with great power in debate, established with wonderful cogency of logic and fertility of illustration, the absolute necessity, if there was to be a Militia, of adopting the ballot. Lord Palmerston on that occasion said, ‘All these arguments are irresistible; but the reasoning of my noble and right honourable friends rests entirely on this assumption, that the people of England cannot be trusted.’ It was upon that issue he took the opinion of this House, and that the Government was changed. And was he, let me ask, right or wrong in the view which he maintained? Why, you had a Militia established on the voluntary principle, and you found that the people of England could be trusted. They received their bounty money and came back in accordance with their engagement every year, and no institution could be more successful, notwithstanding the tone which had been adopted—that it was impossible to establish a Militia on the voluntary principle, because the great body of the people could



not be trusted. I now say the same thing with regard to these frequent remarks of the right honourable gentleman the member for South Lancashire, who assumes that everybody who is about to be introduced into the constituencies is already preparing to be bribed ; that every gentleman who expects to be a member of Parliament is ready to become a briber ; and, that a scene of corruption will be the consequence of this popular franchise. I would remind the right honourable gentleman of the extreme difficulty, and not only the extreme difficulty, but the immense cost, of bribery under the circumstances which will follow the passing of this Bill. Why, it would exhaust all those fabulous resources which have recently been the subject of investigation before committees, and with results with which the honourable member for Birmingham seems so peculiarly to sympathise.

Let me take the fifty-seven boroughs in which the Small Tenements Act is universally in force, and which furnish the best test on this point. Among these boroughs there are only ten which have less than 500 occupiers within their limits, the average of the whole fifty-seven being 2,445 in each constituency. Well, those wicked vestrymen and artful election-agents are to pay their rates for 2,445 men for two years, and if you take the average existence of Parliaments at  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years, you will have them paying their rates for that number for that time ; and when they have paid their rates, what hold, I would ask, would they have on them ? For if they consented to pay their rates for three and a half or even two years, I think it very likely they would turn round when the hour for action came, and, in consequence of the experience which they had acquired, expect something further and upon a larger scale. Yet this is the sort of argument—this appeal to the impossible—which is used to show that a proposal which is politic and necessary ought not to be adopted.

The third menace of the right honourable gentleman was of this nature : he says the distinction between different classes of rate-payers must be abolished. Now, that is a very serious question, and one on which a decision ought not to be pronounced by this House in haste. I very much doubt the policy in a country like England, and with institutions such as these

prevail, of attempting by artificial means to obtain anything like a similarity of suffrage at a sacrifice of what I may venture to call the natural circumstances in which we are placed. It is very true that it is most desirable not to deal in a Bill like the present with any privileges which happen previously to exist. If, therefore, you give the franchise to new classes on the condition of personally paying rates and of adequate residence, you must adopt provisions which are not identical with those which prevail at present under the law; but that difficulty has been felt before. It is not the first time, as the right honourable gentleman reminded us the other night, that such combinations have been considered by cabinets and Governments of which he was a distinguished member. Provisions precisely the same as those we now propose, making a distinction between those already in possession of the franchise and newly-enfranchised classes, were contained in the Reform Bill introduced by the Government of Lord Aberdeen, and there were also provisions specially guarding the rights and privileges of old constituencies. That shows that the subject must have been considered by the wise and eminent men—some of them the most wise and eminent whom the country has produced this century—who were members of that cabinet. You may depend upon it that it was not idly that such regulations were framed, and framed too at a time when a 6*l.* rental was the reduction suggested, instead of the great reduction which is now proposed.

The right honourable gentleman says that I am happy in remembering the mistakes of my predecessors. Now, that may be a taunt or it may be a philosophic observation; but I know this—to revert to the immortal subject of the lodger franchise, which, we are told, is the great political question of the day—that, in the Bill of last year, that favourite offspring of the intellect and passion of the right honourable gentleman, it was enacted that there should be a qualifying term of two years' residence. What, then, becomes of all this idle rhodomontade about our newfangled schemes and principles, which it is said the English people cannot endure, when eight or nine months ago the same principles and policy were professed, advocated

and recommended by the right honourable gentleman himself? Now, I have presumed to impress upon the House that this is a most important question, and I hope it will not decide upon it with any precipitation. It is of the utmost consequence, if you establish the suffrage on the principles which we recommend, that into it the element of residence, and adequate residence, should enter. There is no other condition which would give satisfaction to the people of this country generally, and permit me to say that there is no condition which has been more popularly received by the working classes.

We have some means, though we may not be favoured with all the inspired information respecting the people which hovers round the head of the honourable member for Birmingham, of becoming acquainted with the feelings and opinions of the great variety of classes in this country at the present moment. There is not a day on which, on this question of Parliamentary Reform, the Government are not in the receipt of, I do not say hundreds, but scores upon scores of important communications coming from all classes of working men, individually, collectively, in assembled bodies and committees; and I will frankly admit that very critical and shrewd remarks are in them sometimes made on our propositions, for I do not pretend that they contain nothing but eulogium. They are communications which we attend to with respect, and by which I hope we may profit; but although in some of them considerable objections are urged with regard to rating—and not unnaturally, because when a man is called upon to pay he thinks twice before assenting to such a proposal—there is observable in them this remarkable characteristic, that without exception they entertain but one opinion on the question of residence. They cheerfully propose the municipal term of residence as a qualification for the exercise of the franchise; so that all this vaunted indignation of the right honourable gentleman is entirely misplaced, and is indulged in in complete ignorance of what the feeling of the country really is on the subject of residence. This is a condition which recommends itself to the good sense, and is accepted by the integrity of Englishmen, and we shall, I believe, make a great mistake if we deviate

from this proposition in the Bill. I admit that there is at first sight something invidious—though that interpretation does not seem to have occurred to those to whom I have just been alluding—in having one household qualification based on one year, and another for a longer term; but when you are dealing with complicated transactions of this kind, and when you are adding new franchises to old constituencies, there must be irregularities from which some persons may draw invidious inferences, though the people at large do not. If you make any proposition in Committee with a view to remove this invidious character, without destroying the fundamental condition, we shall, of course, be prepared to consider it. It has been suggested that the term with regard to the 10*l*. householders should be increased to two years, reserving all existing rights, and the suggestion may be worthy of consideration; but depend upon it the House will commit a great error if it supposes that by reducing the term of residence as a test of fitness for the exercise of the franchise it will be doing that which the working classes either desire or approve.

I now approach the fourth head of the impeachment. It is said that the taxing franchise and the dual vote must be abandoned. Let me say a word first about the taxing franchise. I have already touched upon the lodger franchise, and I leave that respectable franchise, the savings bank franchise, and others invented by Lord John Russell—who is supposed to be the most learned man on the subject of franchises—I leave them with the dust of almost venerable antiquity on them, and I proceed to this dreadful invention of Lord Derby's Government—the franchise founded on direct taxation. But this, too, has not the charm of originality. This, also, is a franchise proposed by previous administrations. Let me call the attention of the House to the circumstances under which this franchise was first proposed. It was proposed first in 1852, Lord John Russell then being Prime Minister. He had to draw up a Reform Bill. Generally speaking, that is an easy task to him; but on this occasion he wished to appear with some novelty, and some new franchises were proposed. Being a man of a constitutional temperament, he determined to have a franchise

founded on the greatest duty of Englishmen—that of paying taxes. He thought that duty should confer a right. When a minister, and especially a minister more distinguished for his constitutional than his financial knowledge, projects a franchise of this kind, of course he avails himself of the best information. He brings to his aid the intelligent views of adepts; he broaches his idea, and has it well discussed in argument by persons well versed in all the details, and it was only, of course, on their advice that he adopted the scheme which was proposed to this House, and which died an untimely death. The House never pronounced against it; but in the course of time—in the course of two rather important and troubled years—there was a new administration, and a new Reform Bill was introduced. The question of the franchise founded on direct taxation was again brought before the consideration of Parliament. Mark what happened between 1852 and 1854 on the subject of direct taxation.

The question of the income-tax during those two years was the question of the day. It engrossed public attention and made the fate and fall of ministers. The right honourable gentleman the member for South Lancashire obtained, and justly obtained, great distinction for the manner in which he treated the question of the income-tax, and showed himself a complete master of all its details. It was a great advantage to Lord Russell, when Lord Aberdeen deputed to him the task of providing a franchise founded on taxation, that he could consult the right honourable gentleman,—a man transcendent on all subjects, eminent for his knowledge of finance, but most remarkable for his knowledge of direct taxation. Any failure which Lord Russell met with in 1852 might be ascribed to circumstances totally irrelevant to the merits of the Bill; they could not again be anticipated, especially with the immense advantage of the assistance of the right honourable gentleman, who is able to take a part in the consideration of every subject. I have no doubt he was consulted on every part of the Reform Bill of 1854. I believe he drew up the proviso which saved the rights of the 10% householders. It is in his style. It was, I say, of immense advantage to Lord Russell, when forming a

franchise founded on direct taxation, that he had the assistance of a person of the great ability and strong character of the right honourable gentleman, who was entire master of the subject. There can be no doubt the right honourable gentleman was the constructor of the franchise founded on direct taxation. Then, how can we reconcile with such circumstances the language of the right honourable gentleman, that this franchise will make faggot votes; that it is the most objectionable of all propositions; and, to repeat the words employed by the right honourable gentleman last night, it must be abandoned? Whether the House will abandon it or not is a subject for future consideration; but practical men who know as much about the incidence of the income-tax and the subject of taxation generally as the right honourable gentleman the member for South Lancashire laugh at his objections and say that there is nothing in them. They are perfectly surprised at the remarks which the House of Commons received with the natural deference and the natural credulity which it is the pleasure of the House to extend to the right honourable gentleman.

I have before me some remarks on the subject in a letter dated March 24, written by one whom I suppose the right honourable gentleman will not hesitate for a moment to acknowledge to be a consummate judge of the subject, and whom I know personally he highly respects. I will read it:—‘I do not see that the proposition for giving the payers of direct taxation to the amount of 20s. a vote would offer the means for creating faggot votes. In the first place, the persons *bonâ fide* liable in almost every such case would have a vote from other sources. As regards the income-tax I think it is absurd to suppose that a man would return his income for assessment, having none, for the purpose of getting on the register. He must do it annually and pay the tax, and he could not obtain it back on the ground of exemption. With regard to the assessed taxes, the assessment is not made until after the year in which the article subject to taxation has been kept; and will a person state in his assessment paper that he had a carriage, horses, and servants in the year preceding, having had none? I do not believe it, for persons of that class would not be supplied with the ordi-

nary printed tax-paper to make the return which would be brought into the assessment. And how could they be assessed? The revising barrister should be empowered to require the claimant to prove his *bonâ fide* liability, and a clause to that effect should be inserted in the Bill.' Well, that is the opinion of Sir Charles Pressley, and everybody who knows him, knows him to be a man of consummate ability. Here is another opinion—that of a calmer temperament, perhaps, but it is well worth the consideration of the House. It is the opinion of Mr. Stevenson, and he says that he agrees with Sir Charles Pressley in applying the remedy which he suggests. But he adds that he would be disposed to doubt whether any inquisition into the affairs of men who are to be charged with the income-tax would be necessary, for it should be remembered that the assessment of men in situations are furnished by their employers, and that, therefore, no extensive frauds could be committed without the knowledge of their masters.

Now, I ask the House, after having these opinions from such men, and remembering that Lord Aberdeen's administration was the author of this very franchise, and which no doubt was constructed under the special advice and counsel of the right honourable gentleman opposite—or, if not, he was remiss in the performance of his duties—as a member of that cabinet, whether such arguments as he used last night should have been uttered, and particularly when we think of the respect due to Lord Russell, whether they should not have been withheld. There should have been more regard for the feelings of that distinguished nobleman. I think the right honourable gentleman might have spared the epithets he showered on this franchise. It is very possible that in the Committee it may be improved. Well, if not, what is the use of going into Committee? Some honourable gentlemen seem to think it a wise thing to sneer at the action of their own Committee. These are questions, if there are any, with respect to which the House has the power of improving the suggestions of ministers.

I leave for a moment, until I have touched upon some slighter topics, the question of the dual vote, in order to come to the fifth article of impeachment, which was couched in the

same imperative and authoritative language—‘the redistribution must be enlarged.’ (‘Hear, hear!’ from an honourable gentleman on the Opposition Benches.) The honourable member who cheers is bound to tell us what he means by enlarging the redistribution. I will not do as the right honourable gentleman did last night—I will not call upon the honourable member to make his maiden speech now by way of parenthesis to my observations; but I must say that, in trying to settle the most difficult question of the day, we have a right to expect from the honourable member, as well as from a statesman in the position of the right honourable gentleman opposite, some indication of their views of enlarged redistribution. That, Sir, is a very important question. We, Sir, may have contracted views and limited notions on the subject, but we have been frank in stating them. Is the right honourable gentleman the member for South Lancashire, then, to sit there, with his large process of distribution, surrounded by some who think themselves his followers and his friends, while he may be prepared to stab them to the heart? I say that particularly because I am told there is to be a large scheme of redistribution, with which it is impossible to proceed without destroying his most intimate friends.

Now, Sir, we have laid down the principles on which we think redistribution ought to take place. If there are any gentlemen who think that any strange and new principle should be introduced; if there are advocates and distinguished men who have schemes of cumulative voting and other means of obtaining the opinion not only of majorities but of others, but which new principle cannot be applied without a great change in our whole electoral scheme; I understand, I respect those opinions, though I differ from them. But I deny that any man has a right to loll on his easy seat in the House of Commons, and tell us, when a practical proposition is brought forward, the redistribution must be enlarged. I say the right honourable gentleman ought to take the earliest opportunity of informing the country what are the views on which he thinks redistribution ought to take place, and calm the uneasy feeling of all his adherents—uneasy feelings with which I sympathise, but do not wish to share. Then we are told that the county



franchise must be reduced. Well, we have reduced it; we make a proposal to reduce the county franchise. The county occupation franchise is at present 50*l.* We propose it should be 15*l.*, on a rating basis certainly; but everyone will admit that that is a very large reduction. I have not heard that any much larger reduction is proposed. At any rate, that is a matter of secondary importance. It is a matter for discussion in Committee. Did Lord Palmerston, when he voted for the Bill of the honourable member for Surrey—his speech being for a 10*l.* qualification—did he not say he was not pledged to 10*l.*, and in Committee would propose twenty? Then, as to voting-papers—it is a very interesting and important question. So far as I am concerned, they will not be pressed; but it is a question on which the opinion of the House ought to be taken, and I heard with pleasure last night that the member for Sheffield—I say the member for Sheffield, for so he should always be described—the member for Sheffield did incidentally remark that of the principle of voting-papers he approved. I don't say he is pledged to the application of it in the Government Bill, but every man of sense and experience must feel that this is a very important principle, well worthy of the consideration of the House of Commons.

Mr. Roebuck: I beg to inform the right honourable gentleman that he makes a mistake. I never said any such thing.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer: I regret, Sir, that the pleasing illusion has been dispelled; but I have such confidence in the intelligence and candour of the honourable and learned gentleman that I will not despair that he may yet support it.

Now, Sir, let me ask the attention of the House to what the member for Birmingham very properly described as, after all, the great question—the borough franchise. You have been trying to deal with the borough franchise for fifteen years. Five Governments have made propositions—four Governments certainly; the fifth proposed no change, but still, at least, they expressed by their policy an opinion on the subject. Five Governments have attempted to deal with the borough franchise. It has been twice attempted to be dealt with in this House of Parliament. There is no figure, no combination of

figures, there are no means by which value can be ascertained, that you have not had recourse to; and now some gentlemen opposite are following the old track, and believe that they have arrived at a solution of all difficulties and determination of all political perplexity on the subject, by taking refuge in 5*l.* rating, when everyone knows that it is as shifting as the sand for a foundation on which to rest any superstructure, and that all those election agents we hear of, and that all those ambitious and cunning overseers that now occupy so much attention, could by their power or favour convert a 3*l.* or 4*l.* into a 5*l.* rating with the greatest ease. We have taken the subject into consideration, and have thought it was wise to establish the franchise on a distinct principle that could not be mistaken; and we say, if a man pays his rates, and has resided a certain time, that is *primâ facie* evidence that he is a man of a regular, methodical, and dutiful course of life; and, on the whole, that is a very good test.

You must have some test in all these cases. The member for Birmingham is against all tests whatever. If you see a man without a coat, you would hardly say he should have the franchise. If he had a coat, you may say that was not sufficient test of his qualification. I think there are such things as tests, and men on this, as on other subjects, must in some degree be governed by circumstances. The man who has a house, who is rated to the poor, who pays his rates, and for two years has paid his rates—these are circumstances that recommend him to our minds as a man competent to fulfil a trust. But then the member for Birmingham and a great many members before him have said, ‘Your principle may or may not be a good one; but we will assume in argument that it is a good principle; but in your application of it it may not be good. You find that practically you are leaving out of the enjoyment of the franchise a great many men who are quite competent to exercise it and deserve it, and that in consequence of legislation not, after all, very old. Where we are talking of the rights of an ancient constitution, and speculating on the possibility of investing men with rights which may influence the destiny of our country for ages to come, you come and tell us of rating Acts which, after

all, were only passed in the memory of our fathers and ourselves, and these are to be the obstacles which are to prevent us from establishing the franchise of Englishmen on the ancient and proper basis.' But we meet that difficulty fairly and thoroughly, I think; and we say, let every man who, by the action of these local or general Acts is not rated to the relief of the poor have the privilege of calling upon the official person to rate him; and let him in consequence obtain the enjoyment of the suffrage.

No one pretends that the principle is not sound, and that the proposition is not large. The principle is this: a man who is personally rated, and who has by his residence what is thought in this country a fair claim to the trust of the community, is to have the suffrage. And if by these peculiar Acts of Parliament there are classes who are, as it were, prevented from enjoying on these conditions the suffrage, we give them the right, notwithstanding these Acts, of asserting their claim and acquiring the franchise. Now, who can deny that that principle is correct in theory? The application of it is vast and unlimited. What, then, are the objections to this? We have heard many, but I think they were summed up in the speech we heard from the honourable and learned member for Richmond (Sir Roundell Palmer). I remember—I am sorry to say one remembers too many things now—but I remember, and the right honourable member for South Lancashire, who was in that Parliament, remembers also, that there was a great party struggle in this House (and the right honourable gentleman belonged then to the same party as myself) with respect to the policy pursued by Government in regard to China. A reference was made to the elaborate speech of a lawyer delivered during that debate by Sir James Graham, whose name is not often mentioned in this House, but is never by me to be mentioned without respect and affection, for he was one of the most considerable men we ever had in this House. He rose in his stately cynicism and exclaimed, 'Let us get out of the region of Nisi Prius;' and when we come here to offer the franchise to the people of England—notwithstanding the imputations of the member for Birmingham—in a spirit of sincerity and truth;

when we offer to establish it on a principle that no one can controvert, and to apply it without limit—when I heard those observations of the honourable and learned gentleman the member for Richmond, I recollected the observation of Sir James Graham, and I say we must get out of the region of *Nisi Prius*.

But there is another spirit in which to deal with this question other than that of the honourable and learned gentleman, and that is the spirit of the right honourable gentleman opposite, who takes a more statesmanlike view of the question; for though on the subject of rating he delighted and misled the House at the same time, yet he touched on greater themes. He said this system of yours is all inequality; this is the difficulty I find in it; this is the fatal consequence of it, you will not find two towns in which the same suffrage will exist. There are 57 towns in which the Small Tenements Act prevails; there are 92 in which it partially prevails; and there are 27 in which it does not prevail at all. And then the honourable gentleman says, ‘Good God, what will be the consequence of the application of such a proposition as that in your Bill?’

Why, Sir, I always thought that what we have been complaining of for years was the dreary monotony of the settlement of 1832, and the identical character of the constituency under that Act. Every time these discussions were brought on we were told over and over again that what the country languished for was the variety of franchise that we were deprived of by the Act of 1832, and that if that had been introduced in any of the schemes of later years, one of the great wants of the country would have been supplied. It had been said, and most justly said, that the remarkable characteristics of this assembly —the variety of character which distinguishes it—is really owing to the machinery of the small boroughs which were called into existence—probably under the Plantagenets, but certainly under the Tudors and Stuarts—and which have given to England that varied representation of interests which India and our multifarious colonies, the settlements of two oceans and two hemispheres, demanded. And I say of these poor

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which have been so criticised ; these Small Tenement Acts which prevail, we are given to understand, with a power as secret and inscrutable as that of the Jesuits, that they have absolutely given us that variety which the country requires, and which I believe is a most admirable quality.

Why, how does it work ? There are twenty-seven boroughs under this system in which almost household suffrage prevails. What is the harm of that ? Have you not been year after year deploring that you have no longer members for Preston and such places elected by household suffrage ?—that we have no longer a system which produces among us a Hunt or a Cobbett ? Among the twenty-seven towns in which the Small Tenements Act prevails, you have this large constituency. There is a dozen of these twenty-seven boroughs having the most considerable constituencies in England. There are Stockport, Bradford, and half a dozen others. (Mr. Gladstone : Stoke.) That is one of the greatest arguments I have heard in favour of it, for the right honourable gentleman the other night took advantage of the position he had in the debate, and he appealed to my honourable friend the member for Stoke, who, in consequence, delivered a fiery invective against our Bill. I won't stop to consider what would be his relative position if this 5*l.* rating were adopted in his borough instead of our proposal. It would make a difference of only a very few thousands. There would be a difference of between 15,000 and 9,000. But everyone knows that my honourable friend is perfectly superior to any political accidents of this kind. The honourable member is member for the Potteries, and in my opinion he will always represent the Potteries, because they are filled by a very intelligent population, who like men of social standing and refined taste in the arts, and who are not insensible to the charms of the rich and grotesque rhetoric which distinguishes him.

Well now, Sir, let me ask the House to consider what is the result of our proposal respecting the borough franchise ? Our proposal—I must repeat it again, even at the risk of wearying the House—is that every householder who is rated to the poor, and personally pays his rates, and who has occupied his house for two years, shall possess the franchise. I never wished, in

arguing this question, to restrain its merits to the question of the exact numbers that may be admitted under it to the enjoyment of the suffrage. I think that on that subject an immense mistake has been made. It is a mistake to suppose that your numbers make democracy. So long as you have fitness and variety, it is impossible that democracy can prevail. In our proposal we believe that these two elements do prevail. Now, Sir, recurring to a point to which I alluded when I first rose to answer the honourable member for Birmingham, I mentioned the other night that by our scheme 240,000 persons, in round numbers, would be qualified to enjoy the franchise, and I thought that it was the duty of statesmen and politicians in the proposal of laws to look to those who were qualified, and not to those who would vote.

I think, with great deference, that the House has rather erred in trying to calculate the state of the poll. But this is a practical assembly, and I adopted its tone, and I argued the case in the way in which the House, and especially the right honourable gentleman (Mr. Gladstone), appeared to wish it to be considered. The right honourable gentleman tells us that my 240,000 qualified persons would only prove to be 120,000 persons who could possibly go to the poll. I believe, however, he did not subject even them to the constitutional conditions of our Bill—that they should be personally rated, and that they should reside for two years. (Mr. Gladstone: I have.) We must have some opposition to our Bill, but it should be an opposition on some definite ground. Is it a Radical, or is it a Conservative Bill? You must oppose it on one ground or the other. You cannot blow hot and cold upon it. I brought it forward, not as a Radical, but as a Conservative measure. I brought it forward as a Conservative, but as a popular Bill; and if the word had not been objected to the other night, I would say I defy any person to show me any measure which the House has passed of a more popular, and at the same time of a more conservative character. I admit that these 120,000 may be the most that are specifically admitted to the exercise of the franchise by our proposals. We never considered the numbers, but we looked to the principle. We looked to the

means by which we might unite competency and fitness with variety of character, to form the constitution of the country. If we have to reduce the 240,000 by one half, the same rule must be applied to the 460,000 compound-householders, who, according to the honourable member for Birmingham, are excluded by this Bill. I never understood that the honourable member for Birmingham was ready to enfranchise all these persons. On the contrary, no man has ever impressed upon society more strenuously that there are a great many people to whom he would not give the power of voting. Following, then, the principle to which I have just referred, those 460,000 compound-householders will be reduced to 230,000. If you apply the constitutional conditions upon which we ask the House to pronounce an opinion, that number will be still further reduced. Upon these constitutional conditions the House ought to give an opinion. Are they or are they not of opinion that a man who is to be entrusted with the suffrage should be rated to the poor, should pay his own rates, and have, moreover, a two years' residence in the place where he is so rated?

I cannot apprehend that the number that will be admitted within the pale of the Constitution, as it is called, by the scheme which we propose, will be so great as to cause any distrust or alarm. I believe that those who will obtain the franchise, and who are not compound-householders, will not exceed the number which the right honourable gentleman the member for South Lancashire has estimated as the immediate consequence of our Bill. But it must be remembered that our Bill is not framed, as was the one of last session, to enfranchise a specific number of persons. We do not attempt that. We lay down a principle, and let that principle work; but if you ask us what will be the result of its working, we say—although we do not wish to found our policy upon it—that we do not apprehend the number that will be admitted to the enjoyment of the franchise will exceed the number contemplated by the Bill of last session. But there is this difference between our proposition and the proposition made by the right honourable gentleman. The proposition of the right honourable gentleman was founded upon a state of things which was liable to be

changed the next year, when the question might possibly have  
o be raised again, while the proposition that we make is  
ounded upon a principle that is not liable to alteration. With  
egard to the dual vote, I frankly confess, when I consider how  
imited may be the number enfranchised by our scheme, that I  
am not prepared to recommend a proposition which was ori-  
ginally intended to protect the middle classes against an in-  
vasion of their political power. That proposition as to the dual  
vote was not merely brought forward as a check and a counter-  
poise. No such mere vulgar idea entered our minds. It is  
all very well for gentlemen to sneer. Nothing is easier than  
that; but you must recollect that for a number of years the  
attention of some of the most eminent men, and of some of the  
profoundest thinkers, has been given to the subject of Parlia-  
mentary representation; and that by many of them it has been  
held that it is impossible to disturb the balance of political  
power as it now exists, without departing from the old system  
of apportioning one vote to each individual. We cannot, how-  
ever, be blind to what has recently occurred. We believed  
that men of great mark and standing were prepared to support  
this view; and possibly, even now, before we have finished  
with this Bill, we shall find more than one honourable member  
rising to propose a still broader and stronger principle than the  
one involved in the dual vote. The question is a profound  
one, and one that has commanded and will command great  
attention. But this is essentially a practical assembly, and it  
is the business of Her Majesty's Government to bring forward,  
and, if possible, to pass a measure of Reform. We must also  
defer to the wishes of our supporters. What encouragement  
have we received from this side of the House upon this point?

Do honourable gentlemen mean to say that we must dis-  
regard the opinions of our friends? Why, Sir, we are not pre-  
pared to disregard even the opinions of our foes. If there be any  
one question upon which the opinion of the House has been  
expressed more clearly than upon another, it has been upon  
this. And most certainly we have received no encouragement.  
From first to last no one has spoken a single word in its favour.  
I had hoped that some stray philosopher would have risen to



say something in its behalf, and to have lent dignity to our forlorn position. I had hoped that the noble viscount the member for Stamford (Viscount Cranbourne) would have given it his support, but even he denounced it.

Viscount Cranbourne: I beg the right honourable gentleman's pardon: I distinctly stated that I thought the proposal just.

At any rate the noble viscount said he believed it to be impracticable—would do no good. How can one fight against such difficulties? I am prepared to fight against the greatest difficulties. But we stand here as practical men, with a duty to fulfil, and that is to pass a Bill for the Amendment of the Representation of the People, and it would therefore have been worse than idle to persist against such opposition.

One word before I conclude. I hear much of the struggle of parties in this House, and I hear much of combinations that may occur, and courses that may be taken, which may effect the fate of this Bill. All I can say on the part of my colleagues and myself is that we have no other wish at the present moment than with the co-operation of this House to bring the question of Parliamentary Reform to a settlement. I know the Parliamentary incredulity with which many will receive avowals that we are only influenced in the course we are taking by a sense of duty; but I do assure the House—if they need such assurances after what we have gone through, after the sacrifices we have made, after having surrendered our political connection with men whom we more than regarded—I can assure them no other principle animates us but a conviction that we ought not to desert our posts until this question has been settled. Rest assured that it is not for the weal of England that this settlement should be delayed. You may think that the horizon is not disturbed at the present juncture. You may think that surrounding circumstances may be favourable to dilatory action. Some of you may think in the excitement of the moment that ambition may be gratified, and that the country may look favourably upon those who prevent the passing of this Bill. Do not believe it. There is a deep responsibility with regard to this question resting, not on the

Government merely, but upon the whole House of Commons. We are prepared, as I think I have shown, to act in all sincerity in this matter. Act with us cordially and candidly : assist us to carry this measure. We will not shrink from deferring to your suggestions so long as they are consistent with the main object of this Bill, which we have never concealed from you, and which is to preserve the representative character of the House of Commons. Act with us, I say, cordially and candidly : you will find on our side complete reciprocity of feeling. Pass the Bill and then change the ministry if you like.

## DEBATE ON MR. GLADSTONE'S AMENDMENT,

April 12, 1867.

[On the above date Mr. Gladstone moved an amendment which was intended to confer the franchise on the householder who compounded for his rates as well as on the householder who paid them. The compound-householder, it may be remembered, was one of the most important and prominent personages who figured in the course of these debates. It was the original object of the Bill to establish a *bonâ fide* rate-paying franchise, it being considered that personal payment of rates afforded some trustworthy guarantee for the respectability and responsibility of the payer. The Opposition endeavoured to make out that the distinction between the two classes was illusory, and that to limit the privilege to the direct payer of rates was to levy 'a fine upon the franchise.' The answer to this was that the increase of rent charged to the compounding landlord was more in amount than the rate, so that the non-compounder got his vote more cheaply than if he had compounded. This debate was the first real trial of strength between the Government and the Opposition, and when after the division the paper was handed to Mr. Whitmore, the Conservative whip, a burst of cheering broke out from the Conservative benches such as no one who heard it is ever likely to forget. It was redoubled, *per cuneos geminatus*, when the numbers were read out—for Mr. Gladstone's amendment 289, against it 310. And none rushed to shake hands with the Chancellor of the Exchequer more enthusiastically than those Tory country gentlemen whom he was absurdly said to have betrayed. It was of this occasion that Lady Beaconsfield loved to tell how her husband, refusing an invitation to supper pressed upon him by the members of the Carlton, hurried home to the 'best of wives' and ate half the raised pie and finished the bottle of champagne which she had prepared for his reception. The question of the compound-householder was afterwards settled by abolishing composition, with the warm approval of Mr. Henley, who made an excellent speech on the subject, May 17.]

THE Chancellor of the Exchequer said—Mr. Dodson, Sir, although we are in Committee on the Bill for the Representation of the People, there really are two policies before the House to-night on the most important portion of that measure. Although we are formally called upon to amend the Bill I had the honour to introduce, we are really considering in respect of the borough franchise a contrary policy and a counter-proposition. The right honourable gentleman the member for South Lancashire proposes to draw what has been happily and truly described as a hard-and-fast line, below which no one can enjoy the privilege of the franchise. On the other hand, we have proposed a measure under which every inhabitant of a house subject to certain conditions, which are in harmony with the habits and manners of the country, and which I think are approved of by the rational discrimination of the people, may possess the franchise. Instead of drawing a hard line, we have said to all payers of rates who are not now enfranchised, ‘We will take care that you shall have an opportunity of acquiring and enjoying the right of voting.’ These are the two schemes for the settlement of the borough franchise before the Committee to-night, for it would have been worse than idle to limit our discussion to the few and scanty words that will be formally put by Mr. Dodson, for the decision of the Committee. We must take the bundle of amendments suddenly put upon the table by the right honourable gentleman opposite as descriptive of the whole scheme, and the scheme is that which was indicated in the instruction relinquished by the honourable and learned member for Exeter. Now, Sir, to the proposition we have made for establishing the borough franchise upon a rated household franchise, to be enjoyed by the occupier on personally paying the rate, the right honourable gentleman has offered two main objections—the first of which is that the principle of rating is new-fangled and alien. Sir, I had thought that the principle of rating was one which was consecrated by the manners and customs of the country from ancient times, and to a remote period in connection with the enjoyment of civil and political rights. It is recognised by the common law and the statute law of past generations, and in the age in which we live

it has been part and portion of one of the most famous laws connected with our political history—the Reform Act of 1832. In many subsequent Acts, and in many public documents of great authenticity which have been brought forward by able statesmen, this principle, now described as alien and new-fangled, has been adopted and sanctioned as the basis of important arrangements, and Parliament has always welcomed and sanctioned these propositions and these arrangements. I was somewhat surprised, therefore, to hear it spoken of as new-fangled and alien. But the second objection is that it is too exclusive. Sir, that objection is scarcely consistent with many observations subsequently made by the right honourable gentleman, with many inferences he afterwards drew, and many conclusions which were cheered by his friends—all pointing to this, that the measure was of a very revolutionary and dangerous character. But, according to the right honourable gentleman, the principal objection to that measure is that its character is too exclusive. Now, I humbly think that in settling the basis of our borough franchise the House has not to consider what the operation of the principle we establish may immediately be—whether it be too exclusive or too expansive—but whether it is a just principle, and whether it will in practice generally and ultimately bring about a satisfactory state of things.

Now, Sir, if this be the objection made to our scheme of establishing the franchise upon personal payment of rates, there are also objections offered to the scheme of the right honourable gentleman, which is founded upon a hard limitation; and the great objection to that hard line which the right honourable gentleman has proposed is that it really offers us no settlement of the question. Although I listened with great attention to the speeches made in support of it, I did not hear one argument to show that the principle of adopting a figure—which we will assume from the other amendments of the right honourable gentleman to be 5*l.*—would give any security for a settlement, nor has any reason been offered us why, if adopted, it should not immediately be disturbed, and why agitation should not be immediately fomented in order to again alter the settlement come to. That is the point which

has been evaded throughout this discussion, and it is the most important point we have to consider. It may be convenient, in explaining the reasons which induced us to offer the plan we have submitted to the consideration of the Committee, to recall their attention to what occurred in 1859. In that year we had to consider the question of Parliamentary Reform, and of course the borough franchise, which was one of the most important portions of the scheme, engaged our deepest attention. The result of our consideration of the subject was that it was impossible with any prospect of satisfaction to disturb the 10*l.* franchise established in 1832, and which now prevails; for that if we came to a rental of 8*l.*, or a rating of 7*l.* or of 6*l.*, there was no standpoint upon which we could rely, and that useless agitation for a further change must be the only consequence. And in that state of things it was absolutely necessary to leave the matter untouched (I am speaking of 1859), or to proceed to the point at which we should probably deal with it, something after the fashion of our present proposition. We took adequate means to ascertain the opinion of the country, and we were convinced that any attempt which would considerably diminish the borough franchise would meet with determined opposition from the borough constituencies, and therefore we felt that the only course to pursue was to recommend to Parliament not to deal with the borough franchise, but we endeavoured to obtain our end by bringing in a portion of the working classes by other means. But what happened under these circumstances? We met with very great opposition to the policy which we recommended, and which subsequent years proved to be accurate and sound. The right honourable gentleman the member for Calne was one of the most busy managers in organising a party for reducing the franchise, and a resolution was passed which destroyed our Government, but which inflicted, I believe, more damage on the Liberal party than almost any step which they have taken.

Then the right honourable gentleman the member for Calne—who was not at the time a right honourable gentleman, but who immediately became one—was promoted to a high post in the Government.

Mr. Lowe: I beg the right honourable gentleman's pardon. I was a right honourable then.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer: The right honourable gentleman will, I believe, not contradict me when I say that he was at the time of which I am speaking at once preferred to a high post in the Government.

Mr. Lowe: I was Vice-President of the Board of Trade in the former Liberal Government, and Vice-President of the Council of Education in the next.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer: I may be permitted to explain to the Committee why it is I have made the observations which have just fallen from me. We do not impute any improper conduct to the right honourable gentleman for the part he took on that occasion. It never entered our minds that because the right honourable gentleman opposed our Bill and supported a policy then, which he has since denounced, and afterwards obtained a high post, that he was in any way influenced by improper motives. But the other evening, when my right honourable friend the Secretary for India<sup>1</sup> expressed in a manner worthy the integrity of his character, and with a sincerity which no one could have doubted, the motives by which his conduct on this question had been dictated, the right honourable gentleman the member for Calne jumped up and imputed my right honourable friend's change of opinion to preferment to high office, and therefore I am justly right in reminding the right honourable gentleman, who is a ready critic, and not well disposed to bear criticism, that he ought to cast some reminiscences over his own past career.

But to return to the subject more immediately under discussion. It is sometimes said that in the proposal which we make with a view to the settlement of the borough franchise, that we are interfering with, or rather, that we are not doing justice to the compound householders, who, according to the speech of the right honourable gentleman the member for South Lancashire, are the creation of the civilisation of the age. Now, I will not enter into any controversy on that subject. It was not only the right honourable gentleman the member for South

<sup>1</sup> Sir Stafford Northcote.

Lancashire, but the honourable member for Birmingham, who thus described the rating Acts which have produced such anomalous results. There are, however, other views entertained of those Acts than that they are the result of the civilisation of the age. There are some who think that jobbing vestries, rapacious landlords and indigent tenants, may have given rise to the necessity for such legislation. We all know very well that those Acts were passed at a period which was not particularly distinguished for public spirit. Even the Small Tenements Act, which is the most recent of them, would, in the opinion of many, probably not have passed in the age in which we live. And I cannot believe, when we are laying down, on principles which I hope may prove permanent, the foundation of so high a privilege as that of electoral right, that we are to be scared from the constitutional course before us, or from taking a part that we approve of by the shadow and phantom of those rating Acts. I cannot help thinking that if we legislate in the spirit which Her Majesty's Government recommend, and if this Bill is allowed to pass into law, many of the inconveniences which you now foresee will, as a necessary consequence, disappear. The men to whom the measure will open the franchise will, it seems to me, be actuated by higher motives than those for which you give them credit, will adapt themselves to the altered circumstances with which they will have to deal, and will not allow their rights to depend on any mere accidental arrangement.

If our principles be sound, those men will assert their sway, and will overcome those difficulties in their path on which you now so much dwell. What we have attempted in the new clause which we have laid on the table will very much soften and mitigate, even by the confession of the right honourable gentleman opposite himself, those difficulties. And if our proposals be inconvenient in their character, and would tend to unjust consequences, would not similar inconveniences, I would ask, be experienced by that multitude which would be admitted under the fixed hard line which the right honourable gentleman himself proposes? Surely under that 5*l*. line there would be many more thousands of compound-householders by whom great inconvenience would have been endured than could be by



possibility inconvenienced by our arrangement. Throughout this discussion, that view of the case has been omitted. Two things are always assumed :—that under the 5*l.* line no one who might fairly aspire to the franchise would be excluded from its exercise, and that with all the openings which we offer to the compound-householders, not one of them will avail himself of the privilege placed within his reach. Can anyone really believe that that would be the case? Under our Bill you will get all those men whom you say you wish to get on the register. If there be men who take no interest in the acquisition of political privileges, of course they will not exert themselves to obtain them, and it is not desirable that they should, because persons without any decided character, or entirely engrossed in the lowest pursuits of life, with no wish to improve their condition, are not those who would reflect credit on the electoral body. That, however, is not, in my opinion, a just description of the majority of our countrymen, and if you do keep out many men who may not qualify themselves for the franchise under the constitutional conditions which we propose, who may be indigent, of a wandering character, or wanting in all those civil virtues of industry and order which you are anxious to promote, what harm will be done? Your object is to obtain the worthy, and if the unworthy are alone excluded we can do no harm.

Then it is said—what are these securities? You cannot for a moment hope that they will continue to exist. There will be a great agitation against them; what, then, will be your position? It really is a mistake to call those checks securities; and if you want to know what is to preserve and guard those securities I will tell you why they will not be impugned. If you want to keep those securities, as you call them, in vigorous existence, you will be able best to do so by means of the people who, by submitting to the conditions which we impose in order to acquire the privileges which we throw open to them, will constitute their most effectual safeguard. When they find that by the personal payment of rates and by residence in a town for a certain time they can secure for themselves the franchise, they will be disposed to look with extreme jealousy on those who do not conform to those conditions, and who do not lead

those regular lives, being placed in the same position. What has happened since the rate-paying clauses of the Reform Bill of 1832 received the sanction of Parliament? Agitation against them has prevailed. Demagogues have made use of those clauses as a subject on which to excite the country. There have been organised operations in certain towns against those clauses. They have, nevertheless, not been abolished, because the common sense of the great majority of the people who pay rates under those conditions has resolved to maintain them, inasmuch as they are barriers against those who may otherwise, without pains, attempt to share their privileges. Therefore, Sir, I think that that charge against what are called the securities is perfectly fallacious, that it is formed in ignorance of our countrymen, and that there is no foundation for any apprehension that if the franchise is granted on these conditions, these conditions will not be observed and guarded, and will not be observed and guarded by the very persons who, by submitting to those conditions, obtain the privileges which they prize. Then the honourable and learned gentleman the member for Exeter made some remarkable observations with regard to this particular topic. He told us that no one could be a stronger advocate than he was for household suffrage; but the misfortune was that the country was not yet prepared for it, and, having thus favoured us with the moral of his political creed, he indulged in a criticism upon this measure, and said, 'These restrictions which you are proposing will ultimately break down, and then you will have household suffrage.' But how inconsistent is the criticism with the creed. The honourable and learned gentleman looks upon household suffrage as the perfection of policy, and regrets that the country is not yet prepared for such a measure; and surely, therefore, when a scheme is brought forward which for a certain time prevents household suffrage coming into operation in consequence of restrictions which in time will cease and break down, the honourable and learned gentleman ought to congratulate us upon our wise and consummate policy in framing a temporary arrangement which will allow the country to enjoy in a certain degree household suffrage till it is prepared for it to the full extent.

Well, Sir, there was one observation made by my noble friend the member for Stamford (Viscount Cranbourne) which certainly was severe upon the measure we propose; but it appeared to me that my noble friend proved too much. The arguments employed by my noble friend were certainly very good arguments against the Bill; but they were no less arguments against all constitutional government. My noble friend said, 'You are increasing the suffrage, you are lowering the franchise, you are conferring power on the multitude. We know what will happen. You will have electioneering agents and a number of political combinations who will avail themselves of the materials you have supplied them with, and the consequences to society will be most dangerous. You will have agitating leaders and all kinds of confederacies.' It is all very true. Demagogues and agitators are very unpleasant, and leagues and registers may be very inconvenient, but they are incident to a free and constitutional country, and you must put up with these inconveniences or do without many important advantages. The arguments of my noble friend, therefore, are not, I think, so much directed against this Bill as against any scheme which would extend political privileges to any portion of the nation.

Now, Sir, I shall not notice some remarks made by the honourable gentleman the member for Stoke-upon-Trent, because he evidently expected that I was going to make a very elaborate reply to what he said. I assure him that I listened with the greatest pleasure to the invectives which he delivered against myself. His style is greatly ornamental to discussion, but it requires practice. And so far as my honourable friend displayed his talents to-night, I listened with the greatest satisfaction. All his exhibitions in this House are distinguished by a prudery which charms me, and when he talks of Asian mysteries I may, perhaps, by way of reply, remark that there is a Batavian grace about his exhibition which takes the sting out of what he has said. Now, Sir, perhaps I may be allowed to put before the House what I believe to be an impartial account of the relation of the Government to the House with respect to their Reform Bill. First of all, then, I would notice

our relations with the right honourable gentleman opposite (Mr. Gladstone). Now the right honourable gentleman opposite is a candidate for power, and no man has a greater right to be a candidate for power. The right honourable gentleman is an opponent with whom any man may be proud to have to contend. I know nothing more legitimate than the ambition of such a man, and I am sure I bear the right honourable gentleman no ill-will, or as little ill-will as a man can bear, for the efforts which he may make to change his position and to cross from one side of the House to the other. But I am sure the right honourable gentleman will not be offended if I, without passion, but, I am sure, clearly express to the House what I believe to be his position with regard to the Government and this question. I can quite understand how the right honourable gentleman should be so very emulous to deal with this important question with which Her Majesty's Government have felt it their duty to grapple; but the right honourable gentleman seems to forget, what he ought to remember. The right honourable gentleman has had his innings. He has dealt with the subject of Parliamentary Reform very recently, and in this House—in this House elected under the auspices of a Government of which he was a member—and he introduced a measure with the advantage, which we have never had, of being supported by a large majority. I do not begrudge the right honourable gentleman those advantages, but I may still remind him of them, and I say under these circumstances, we have a right that there should be no great eagerness to make party attacks. I cannot but view the amendments proposed by the right honourable gentleman in this light. They are not amendments to our Bill. They are counter propositions. Now, some remarks were made with reference to a letter, the character of which was evidently entirely misunderstood by the honourable gentleman who made those remarks. The letter was not addressed to the House of Commons, but to those with whom I am accustomed to act in public life. It was exactly such a letter as honourable gentlemen on both sides of the House are constantly in the habit of receiving. It may be described as a monosyllabic word, the instrument with which

the races of Nemea have been won. The right honourable gentleman suddenly placed upon the paper a declaration of war to the knife, and it was thought desirable that our friends should be addressed, not in the usual hand, but in my own, because it was thought that that fact would, perhaps, induce them to read the letter they received. I acknowledge the right honourable gentleman's position and talents—that he is perfectly justified in attacking the Government; but do not let us misunderstand the motive or the conduct of the right honourable gentleman. Nothing can be more legitimate. It is a party attack; and the endeavour to parry it as a party attack is in accordance with the tactics which were understood to be adopted in the House on this subject. But as regards the House of Commons, generally speaking, I wish on the part of Her Majesty's Government, whatever may be the decision to-night, whatever may be the consequences of this division, to say that in dealing with this question Her Majesty's Government have never for a moment swerved from those sentiments which, with the full concurrence and desire of my colleagues, I have often expressed in this House—namely, that we are most anxious to co-operate with the House in bringing this question of Parliamentary Reform to a satisfactory settlement, and although we could not swerve with respect to the borough franchise from those principles which we regarded as vital—namely, personal payment of rates and residence—still, with regard to almost every other point which has been mentioned in our discussion, we are most anxious, in Committee, after a fair deliberation, and after an interchange of opinion, to adopt that course which the House in its wisdom may think most expedient and desirable.

The right honourable gentleman and the honourable member for Bedford (Mr. Whitbread) have expressed some astonishment at the course which the Government were pursuing, after the concessions they had made. Now, Sir, I and my colleagues are conscious of the heavy task we have undertaken, and how much we must depend upon the assistance of the House in order to bring it to a happy conclusion; but I confess that I really am at a loss to understand what are the concessions which the right honourable gentleman and his friends have

made us. I have been accused one night of giving up everything, and on the next of never having given up anything at all. I know very well that there was an important point—not a fundamental principle, but still an important point—in our original plan which I relinquished at the general desire of both sides of the House, and particularly at the desire of my own friends—there is no doubt about that; but that was a concession from the Government. However, I am sure we shall be most grateful for any concessions which we may receive; but, at the present time, we are not conscious that such gifts have been bestowed on us. Now, whatever the course of this division, I wish the House thoroughly to understand what have been from the first and are now the feelings of the Government with respect to this Bill. As far as the borough franchise is concerned, I must repeat, at the risk of wearying the House, what I have said from the first, that the franchise in our plan is founded upon principles from which we cannot swerve. And the House has always in its discussions accepted that; nor is it a novelty when we say that personal payment of rates and residence are the only conditions upon which we consent to this arrangement of the borough franchise. But I have in my mind no other point of this description at present. It would require a considerable amount of time to form an opinion on the immense number and great variety of amendments, suggestions, and propositions upon the paper at the present moment; but if I and my colleagues had an opportunity, we would consider all these amendments and propositions which honourable gentlemen have placed upon the paper during the holidays with a most anxious desire to change, and modify, and adapt them to any practical course which may be consistent with the general principle of our measure, and we are perfectly prepared to meet the House in that spirit. We have been told that the lodger franchise has been conceded. The right honourable gentleman says I have pledged myself to introduce a lodger franchise, but really I am obliged to correct him, because I have not pledged myself, and for a very good reason. I believe that to introduce such a lodger franchise as would satisfy the House and the country is one of the most difficult things in

the world. All I did say was, and I was careful in saying it, that if a sensible and well-considered proposition were brought forward we would candidly meet it, and I am sure that if it were established in argument it would be adopted by the House. But I have had a great many communications upon the question of the lodger franchise, and every day I find more difficulty in the subject—I find it a very difficult subject.

The right honourable gentleman who makes so much of the lodger franchise must himself be conscious, after being reminded of his language last year, when he was so very strong in his expressions, and informed the House that it was a small matter which chiefly concerned the middle classes—the right honourable gentleman must himself feel, on reflection, that the matter is not so easy as he has stated. I have received many deputations of late, and among them has been one from a society which is very much under the patronage of the honourable member for Birmingham—the Reform League. The members of that deputation spoke to me upon the subject of the lodger franchise, and so far as I can recollect—though my noble friend (Lord Stanley), who was with me, will correct me if I am in error—I distinctly understood from them that they wanted a lodger franchise. But when I asked what residence and value should be the qualification, they looked upon the observation as an insult; so that was not at all encouraging. Many honourable gentlemen are as well informed as I am on this matter; but I say this is very valuable information to the minister or member who is projecting a lodger franchise, which is peculiarly for the working-classes, and especially for the working-classes in London. If value and rating are not to be admitted as qualifications to a lodger franchise, because they would be an insult, I hardly hope we shall be able to carry a lodger franchise such as would meet with the views of all. But let the proposition be made; let it be brought forward by any gentleman who is thoroughly master of the subject, and can bring it fairly before the House, and he will find from me a kind reception for the lodger franchise, and I shall be very glad if he can succeed in bringing forward a proposition satisfactory to the country and the House.

Then with regard to the county franchise and other points upon which questions have been put to me across the House—I object to settling matters of that kind by question and answer across the House, without the advantage of discussion. Take the question of the compounders; gentlemen rise and ask, do you mean to do this or that? I must answer that the question of the compound-householder is one of great difficulty which requires much debating; and the speeches which have been delivered to-night must have convinced the House that it is a question which demanded complete discussion in Committee. Again, I have been asked what we mean to do with the proposition of voting-papers; I reply, that we wish to consult the feeling of the House of Commons upon that matter; and if the House thinks fairly of this and other points, I shall, with the consent of my colleagues, redeem the pledge which I gave, and give those points the consideration they deserve. But, above all, let us have fair discussion and deliberation; that is the spirit in which Her Majesty's Government wish to treat this question with regard to the House. It is a disagreeable thing to distinguish between the House generally and the right honourable gentleman opposite, to whom I always wish, as the head of a party, to pay every honour; but this is a subject of a peculiar character; it has gone through peculiar phases already during the course of this year, and it is my duty to distinguish between the House generally and the right honourable gentleman, though he is the leader of the party, because between the House and the Government upon this question of Parliamentary reform there was an understanding that we were mutually to co-operate, and by mutual confidence and co-operation to bring about, if we could, a fair measure of reform. That is the undertaking which I on the part of my colleagues am perfectly ready to fulfil, and to none of the suggestions which honourable gentlemen opposite have put upon the paper will we refuse the most ample consideration. We will give them all the consideration they deserve, with the anxious desire to adapt and so modify them as to chime in with the principles of our Bill. But, when the right honourable gentleman comes forward suddenly with a counter proposition



to the main proposals of the Government, it is impossible for me to close my eyes to the nature of that movement; I must say to the right honourable gentleman that I cannot in any way agree to the propositions he has made; they would entirely alter and would completely supersede the policy which we recommend the House to adopt; and therefore I trust the right honourable gentleman will clearly understand that in the distinction which I have made I have not done it merely in the heat of debate, for I feel in no heat at this moment. I think, on the eve of an important division, that there should be a clear and honest understanding between the Government and the House of Commons upon this matter of the Reform Bill. We have acted entirely in conformity with our representations to the House; we believe we have experienced from honourable gentlemen true candour and generous consideration, and we are anxious at this moment cordially to co-operate with the House of Commons to settle this question.

THIRD READING, REFORM BILL, 1867.<sup>1</sup>

[As a contribution to the history of Reform, and especially the history of the Reform Bill passed in 1867, this speech is perhaps the most instructive of all which the author of it delivered. He shows that the principle adopted by Lord Derby's Government had been long in contemplation by Conservative statesmen: that when the 10*l*. franchise was once abandoned, no safe resting-place could be found between that and a rating suffrage.]

SIR, the debate of this evening commenced with what may be described as two very violent speeches—that is, speeches very abusive of the measure before the House, and very abusive of the ministers who have introduced it. I am more anxious to vindicate the measure than to defend the Government. But it necessarily happens in questions of this character, which have occupied the attention of Parliament for a long term of years, that it is practically impossible to distinguish the measure from the ministry in any observations upon it. So much depends upon personal character and engagements, and upon the necessity of the time and the temper of the country, when a minister is called upon definitively to act, that it is perhaps impossible to separate in the remarks which I have to offer to the House a consideration of the conduct of the Government from the nature of the Bill which we now ask leave to read a third time. It is very easy for the noble lord the member for Stamford, while he treats of a question which has occupied the attention of Parliament for more than fifteen years, to quote some ambiguous expression which was used

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

early in that period of fifteen years by Lord Derby, and then to cite some small passage in a speech made by myself in the year 1866. But I think that honourable gentlemen on both sides of the House will admit that to arrive at a just judgment of the conduct of public men, and of the character of the measures they propose, it is necessary to take larger and fuller views. Measures of this importance, and the conduct of those who may recommend them, are not to be decided by the quotation of a speech made in 1852, or of the remarks made in 1866. Now, Sir, I accept the challenge made by the noble lord. I will take that very term which he has himself fixed upon as the test of our conduct and our policy. I will throw my vision back over those fifteen years—to that very term of 1852, when we were called upon to undertake the responsibility of administration.

The question of Parliamentary Reform was becoming very rife in 1849 and 1850 and 1851. If I recollect right, it occupied the attention of Parliament when it first met in 1852, when we were sitting in Opposition, and therefore when we acceded to office, and to office for the first time, in the year 1852, although the question was not one which upon reflection men who were responsible for the conduct of affairs would have deemed necessary to treat, yet it was one upon which it was absolutely necessary that a cabinet should have some definite conclusions; and upon which it was quite certain the moment they acceded to office they would be called to express their opinion. It happened in that wise, for I think that within a month after we acceded to office Mr. Hume brought forward, as he was accustomed to do, the whole question of Parliamentary Reform in a very comprehensive manner; referring, not only to the franchise, but to the redistribution of seats, and many other matters connected with it. The cabinet had to meet and to decide upon the spirit in which they would encounter the motion of Mr. Hume, and I was the organ to express their opinions on the subject. The opinions I expressed upon that occasion from this very place were such as do not justify the remarks of the right honourable gentleman. They may not be fresh in the recollection of the House, but I

will say only that upon that occasion, with the full authority of a unanimous Cabinet, expressing the opinion of Lord Derby's Government with regard to the question of Parliamentary Reform, I expressed our opinion that if the subject were again opened—and its immediate re-opening we deprecated—the fault which had been committed in 1832 in neglecting to give a due share of the representation to the working classes ought to be remedied. That was in the year 1852, when, with the full authority of the Cabinet, I said that no measure of Parliamentary Reform could be deemed satisfactory which did not remedy the great fault of the settlement of 1832. And I then contended, as I have done since, that before the settlement of 1832 franchises existed which were peculiar to the working classes, and that although the precise character of those franchises could not, perhaps, have been entirely defended, they should certainly not have been destroyed without the invention of fresh franchises more adapted to the times in which we live, and to the requirements of the classes concerned.

Therefore, it is quite clear that in 1852 our opinions upon Parliamentary Reform—for many of the members of that cabinet are members of the present—were such that the expressions of the right honourable gentleman opposite and the noble lord cannot for a moment be justified.

And, what Sir, occurred afterwards? When we were in Opposition for several years this question was constantly brought under the consideration of Parliament, and it continued to be patronised and encouraged by the then ministers of the Crown, who yet would not deal with it until the very last year of their existence as a cabinet; and then, after an official life of some six or seven years, they did introduce the subject to the consideration of Parliament, and left a Bill upon the table when they resigned their seals of office. It therefore became necessary for us in 1858 to consider the subject, and we did not conceal from ourselves for a moment the difficulties in treating it that we should have to encounter. But such was the situation of the question, such the state of the country with regard to it, such even the private counsel and encouragement of the most influential of our predecessors in office, that we engaged

to consider the question, and to bring forward some measure which we hoped might remove the difficulties that stood in the way of general legislation, and to disembarrass political life. We had then to consider the great question of the borough franchise. It was proposed upon that occasion in the cabinet of Lord Derby that the borough franchise should be founded upon the principle of household suffrage. It is very true that that proposition was not adopted, but it was not opposed, so far as I can charge my memory, on any political ground; it was not adopted by many members of the cabinet, because they believed that if a scheme of that kind were brought forward it would receive no support, generally speaking, in the country. That opinion of Lord Derby's Government I may say was ultimately formed on no mean knowledge; elaborate machinery was had recourse to in order to obtain the information necessary to form an accurate opinion on the subject, and the general tenor of the information which reached us certainly forced us to the conclusion that there was an insuperable objection on the part of the constituencies at that time against any reduction of the borough franchise whatever. That that was a true conclusion, and that the information which led to that conclusion was correct, there can be no doubt, for although we were forced to quit office by a resolution declaring that a reduction of the borough franchise was expedient, those who succeeded us failed in carrying any measure of that kind, and remained in office for years without at all departing from their inaction.

But there is another feature in the policy of the Government of 1859 with regard to this question which I have a right to refer to, and, indeed, am bound to refer to, in vindication of the conduct of the Government. Whatever difference of opinion might have existed in the cabinet of Lord Derby in 1859 on the question of establishing the borough franchise on the principle of rated household suffrage, there was no difference upon one point; the cabinet was unanimous, after the utmost deliberation and with the advantage of very large information upon the subject, that if we attempted to reduce the borough qualification which then existed we must have

recourse to household suffrage, whatever might be the condition. Upon that conclusion we acted, and I am at a loss to discover in the conduct of public men who have acted in the way I have described any foundation for the somewhat frantic attacks which have been made upon us by the right honourable gentleman opposite, and for the bitter, though more temperately expressed, criticisms of the noble lord the member for Stamford. As probably the majority of the present House sat in the late Parliament, the House is well acquainted with the fortunes of the question of Parliamentary Reform during the years which followed the retirement of Lord Derby in 1859.

The question was unsuccessfully treated by the most powerful and popular minister this country has possessed for many years—by one, indeed, who at various times after 1859 apparently occupied a commanding position with reference to any question with which he proposed to deal; and it has so happened that every leading statesman of the day, every party representing any important section of power and opinion in the country who approached this subject have all of them equally failed. Lord Russell failed, Lord Aberdeen failed, Lord Palmerston failed, Lord Derby failed, and we were called upon to reconsider the question when we came into office after a fresh failure by Lord Russell. It is said that we have brought forward a measure stronger than the one we opposed. If that be the case, it is no argument against our measure if it be one adapted to the requirements of the times. But, Sir, we who believe that there should be no reduction of the borough franchise other than what we propose, because there can be no sound resting-place between it and the present qualification, were perfectly justified in hesitating to accept a reduction of the franchise which might have disturbed the machinery of the State, and have resulted in consequences far more perilous than we believe can ensue from the measure we ask you to adopt. There had been for a considerable time a much-favoured plan before the public, and the object, or rather, I should say, the consequence, of this plan, which may be described as a moderate reduction of the borough franchise, was the enfranchisement of a certain favoured portion of the working classes, who are

always treated in this House and everywhere else publicly in terms of great eulogium, who are

Fed by soft dedication all day long,

and assured that they are very much superior to every other portion of the working classes. These were to be invested with the franchise on the implied condition that they were to form a certain Prætorian guard, and prevent every other portion of the working classes of this country from acquiring the privilege, and thus those other portions would be shut out from what is called the pale of the Constitution. This proposal, in different states and different degrees, was constantly before Parliament. We were greatly opposed to it, since we believed it was a dangerous policy, and we saw greater peril to the institutions of the country in admitting a small and favoured section of that kind into the political arena than in appealing to the sympathies of the great body of the people. The working classes will now probably have a more extensive sympathy with our political institutions, which, if they are in a healthy state, ought to enlist popular feeling because they should be embodiments of the popular requirements of the country.

It appeared to us that if this great change were made in the constitutional body there would be a better chance of arriving at the more patriotic and national feelings of the country than by admitting only a favoured section, who, in consideration of the manner in which they were treated, and the spirit in which they were addressed, together with the peculiar qualities which were ascribed to them, would regard themselves as marked out, as it were, from the rest of their brethren and the country, and as raised up to be critics rather than supporters of the Constitution. These were our views, and we retain the conviction that guided us in 1859, and from which if we have deviated, it was only for a moment, and because we thought that on this question it was impossible to come to any solution except in the spirit of compromise and mutual concession. We still adhered to the policy of 1859, and believed if you reduced the borough qualification—and some reduction was now in-

evitable—there was no resting-place until you came to a rating household suffrage.

Well, Sir, under these circumstances we acceded to power last year, and we found it was absolutely necessary to deal with this question; we came into power unpledged, and I have heard with some astonishment reproaches in regard to our change of opinion. I am not here to defend, to vindicate, or even to mitigate every expression I may have used on this subject during the course of many years, but I can appeal to the general tenor of the policy we have recommended. I have always said that the question of Parliamentary Reform was one which it was quite open to the Conservative party to deal with. I have said so in this House, and on the hustings, in the presence of my countrymen, a hundred times. I have always said, and I say so now, that when you come to a settlement of this question, you cannot be bound to any particular scheme, as if you were settling the duties on sugar, but dealing with the question on great constitutional principles, and which I hope to show have not been deviated from, you must deal with it also with a due regard to the spirit of the time and the requirements of the country. I will not dwell upon the excitement which then prevailed in the country, for I can say most sincerely that, without treating that excitement with contempt, or in any spirit analogous to contempt, we considered this question only with reference to the fair requirements of the country. But having to deal with this question, and being in office with a large majority against us, and finding that ministers of all colours of party and politics, with great majorities, had failed to deal with it successfully, and believing that another failure would be fatal not merely to the Conservative party, but most dangerous to the country, we resolved to settle it if we could. Having accepted office unpledged, what was the course we adopted? Believing that it was a matter of the first State necessity that the question should be settled; knowing the majority was against us, and knowing the difficulties we had to deal with, being in a minority—and even with a majority our predecessors had not succeeded—after due deliberation we were of opinion that the only mode of arriving at a settlement



was to take the House into council with us, and by our united efforts, and the frank communication of ideas, to attain a satisfactory solution.

I am in the recollection of the House: I ask whether that is not a faithful account of the situation? It was in harmony with these views that I placed resolutions on the table. It is very true that at that time—in the month of March or February it may be—you derided those resolutions and ridiculed the appeal; but reflection proved the policy was just, and you have adopted it. We have pursued the course which we felt to be the only one to bring this question to a happy termination, and your own good sense, or reflection, has convinced you that the original sneers were not well founded. You have all co-operated with us, and it is by that frank and cordial co-operation that we have arrived at the third reading. The noble lord the member for Stamford says that the Bill is no longer our Bill—that it has been enormously changed in consequence of our having accepted the ten conditions of the right honourable gentleman the member for South Lancashire, which he also informed the House the right honourable gentleman had so imperiously dictated. At the time there was some complaint of the imperious dictation of the right honourable gentleman; but it did not come from me: I can pardon those in Opposition who are inclined to be imperious, but I have no fault to find with the conditions that the right honourable gentleman insisted upon, and which the noble lord says I obsequiously observed.

What were those conditions? Let me recall them to the House. In the first place, the right honourable gentleman insisted—imperiously insisted—that the dual vote should be given up. He declared his implacable hostility to the dual vote, and the noble lord says the dual vote was thereupon given up. It so happened, however, that the dual vote was given up one fortnight before those conditions were so imperiously insisted upon by the right honourable gentleman, and it was given up in consequence of the unanimous reprobation of that political device by the Conservative party: not a single gentleman on our side of the House was in favour of it. That opinion

was expressed in writing and in this House by the right honourable member for Oxfordshire ; and, I will not say in consequence of his imperious dictation, but because he expressed the unanimous feeling of our friends, we took the earliest opportunity of signifying that the dual vote should not be insisted on. Then the noble lord says we gave up one of the bristling securities of the Bill—that of the two years' residence. Well, we did not give that up obsequiously, because we divided the House upon it, and were defeated by a large majority. Some of our friends voted against us, a great many left the House, and the rest supported us under protest ; so that we had no very great Conservative encouragement to stand up for these securities that we are told bristled round our measure. I think the noble lord and the right honourable gentlemen have mistaken the character and spirit of the Conservative party when they describe the Government as leading the party, when, as I believe, the party on this question has always been in advance of the Government. There is not a security that we have proposed that has not been objected to by the Conservative party. I would recall to the recollection of the House a celebrated meeting which took place in halls supposed to be devoted to the conservation of the institutions of the country, at which resolutions were absolutely passed <sup>1</sup>—(Mr. Sandford: No, No!) Well, passed with very little opposition. (Mr. Sandford: No No!) Well, were they not passed at all? (No!) Then am I to understand that the assembly broke up in confusion with a unanimous reprobation of the policy of Her Majesty's Government on this particular point of securities?

What was the next important condition imperiously dictated and obsequiously accepted? It was the great reduction of the county franchise. Now, what happened about the county franchise? We proposed a 15% rating franchise. An honourable gentleman opposite proposed 10%. I was prepared to

<sup>1</sup> A meeting was held at the Carlton Club immediately after the introduction of the first Bill (the Ten Minutes' Bill), when a motion in favour of household franchise was proposed by Mr. Graves, the member for Liverpool, and seconded by Mr. Laird, the member for Birkenhead. No resolution was carried, but the feeling shown was so strongly in favour of the policy afterwards adopted that it determined the conduct of the Government.

vindicate the policy of the Government. A meeting of county gentlemen then took place, at which resolutions were certainly passed, because they were forwarded to me. The Government were entreated by that meeting to accept the county franchise at a lower rate than we proposed. Is not this increased evidence that, instead of hurrying the party into this abyss of danger, it was with very great difficulty that we could keep them back? Then comes the great case of the compound-householder, and the noble lord said that the right honourable gentleman (Mr. Gladstone) declared that there should be no difference between the compounder and non-compounder, and that I immediately and obsequiously gave that point up. But there is some very great mistake here. It is very true that the right honourable gentleman did object to the plans which we originally proposed with respect to the compounder; but when these terrible conditions were so imperiously dictated, the right honourable gentleman did not want the existing arrangements of this Bill to be adopted, but wished us to adopt the line of a 5*l.* rating, which in our opinion would have entirely emasculated the Bill and destroyed its principle.

I have gone through the principal points referred to, because, to make up the ten conditions, the noble lord was obliged to go to the fancy franchises. We gave up the fancy franchises, because the lodger franchise had been accepted by the House, and it was quite unnecessary to have the fancy franchises when the lodger franchise was adopted. Was there any great deviation of principle, or anything astounding in our accepting the lodger franchise which was one of the propositions contained in the Bill we ourselves brought forward in 1859? Therefore, I think I have shown the noble lord that for that portentous statement of his, which seemed so to alarm the House—how this Bill had been enormously changed through the imperious dictation of the right honourable member for South Lancashire, and my obsequious yielding—there is very little foundation. And when I find that on the measure which I am now asking you to read the third time, there were twenty-six considerable divisions, in eighteen of which the right honourable member for South Lancashire voted against

the Government, I fail to discover any evidence of that successful though imperious dictation of which we have heard so much. And, Sir, I think it cannot be said that this was a measure which bristled with securities and precautions that have been given up at the bidding of our opponents. That a great many of them have been given up I shall not deny; but they have been given up not always or in the greatest degree at the bidding of our opponents, and some of them have been given up to the general feeling of the House. Now, Sir, the noble lord says that by yielding to these ten same conditions, I have virtually altered the whole character of the Bill. Now, is that true? Is the whole character of the Bill altered? I contend on the contrary, that the Bill, though adapted of course to the requirements of the year in which we are legislating, is at the same time in harmony with the general policy which we have always maintained. This is a question which cannot be settled by a jeer or a laugh, but by facts, and by facts and results which many of you deprecate and deplore at this moment, and in consequence of which you tell us that you mean to reopen the agitation—a thing which I defy you to do.

I begin with what the honourable gentleman who smiles so serenely may regard as the most difficult question for us—namely, that of the borough franchise—and I say that, if we could not maintain the 10*l.* borough franchise, which members of the Liberal party seem now much to deplore, but which they opposed in 1859, it was perfectly in harmony with the general expression of our opinions, and certainly with our policy as a party, that we should accept such a franchise as we are now recommending to you by this Bill. You declined, the House of Commons declined, and especially the Liberal party declined, to take their stand upon the 10*l.* franchise. You will not deny that; you will not carp at that. Well, but has there been no question since that time between the 10*l.* franchise, upon the merits of which the right honourable gentleman the member for Calne is always dilating, saying it has existed—as he told us to-night in a kind of rhetorical *crescendo*, which becomes more and more surprising—for at least 200 years; has there, I say, been no question, since the Government of 1859,

between retaining the 10*l.* borough franchise and accepting household suffrage? Have you not had the alternative offered of a multitude of schemes? Have you not heard of a franchise to be fixed at 8*l.*, 7*l.*, 6*l.*, and all sorts of pounds?

The question, therefore, for us practically to consider was—whether we were to accept this settlement of the borough franchise, we will say at 5*l.*, or whether we should adhere to the conviction at which we had arrived in 1859—namely, that if you reduced the qualification there was no safe resting-place until you came to a household rating franchise? The noble lord says that immense dangers are to arise to this country because we have departed from the 10*l.* franchise. (Viscount Cranbourne: No!) Well, it was something like that, or because you have reduced the franchise. The noble lord is candid enough to see that if you had reduced it after what occurred in 1859, as you ought according to your pledges to have done, you would have had to reduce it again by this time. It is not likely that such a settlement of the difficulty would have been so statesmanlike that you could have allayed discontent or satisfied any great political demands by reducing the electoral qualification by 40*s.* or so. Then the question would arise—is there a greater danger from the number who would be admitted by a rating household franchise than from admitting the hundreds of thousands—the right honourable gentleman the member for South Lancashire calculated them at 300,000—who would come in under a 5*l.* franchise? I think that the danger would be less, that the feeling of the large number would be more national, than by only admitting what I call the Prætorian guard, a sort of class set aside, invested with peculiar privileges, looking with suspicion on their superiors, and with disdain on those beneath them, with no friendly feelings towards the institutions of their country and with great confidence in themselves. I think you would have a better chance of touching the popular heart, of evoking the national sentiment by embracing the great body of those men who occupy houses and fulfil the duties of citizenship by the payment of rates, than by the more limited and, in our opinion, more dangerous proposal.

So much for the franchise. I say that if we could not carry

out our policy of 1859, the logical conclusion was that in settling the question we should make the proposition which you, after due consideration, have accepted, and which I hope you will to-night pass. Let us look at the other divisions of the subject. I will not test by little points the question of whether we have carried substantially the policy which we recommended. I say look to the distribution of seats. I am perfectly satisfied on the part of Her Majesty's Government with the distribution of seats which the House in its wisdom has sanctioned. I think it is a wise and prudent distribution of seats. I believe that upon reflection it will satisfy the country. It has been modified in one instance, to a certain degree, in favour of views which in principle we do not oppose; but we have succeeded in limiting the application of that principle; and, on the whole, the policy which is embodied in the distribution of seats, which by reading this Bill a third time I hope you are going to adopt, is the policy of redistribution which on the part of the Conservative party I have now for nearly twenty years impressed on this House. And what is that policy? That you should completely disfranchise no single place; that it would be most unwise without necessity to disfranchise any centre of representation; that you should take the smaller boroughs with two members each and find the degree of representation which you wanted to supply in their surplus and superfluity of representation. You have acted upon that principle. But, above all, year after year I have endeavoured to impress on this House the absolute necessity of your doing justice to those vast, I may almost say, unrepresented millions, but certainly most inadequately represented millions, who are congregated in your counties. You may depreciate what you have agreed to, but in my opinion you have agreed to a very great measure. At any rate it is the first, and it is a very considerable, attempt to do justice in regard to the representation of the counties.

Then although I am the last person in any way to under-rate the value of the assistance which Her Majesty's Government have received from the House in the management of this measure; although I believe there is no other example in the-

annals of Parliament when there has been such a fair interchange of ideas between the two sides of the House, and notwithstanding some bitter words and burning sentiments which we have occasionally listened to—and especially to-night—there has been, on the whole, a greater absence of party feeling and party management than has ever been exhibited in the conduct of a great measure; although personally I am deeply grateful to many honourable gentlemen opposite for the advice and aid I have received from them, yet I am bound to say that in the carrying of this measure with all that assistance, and with an unaffected desire on our part to defer to the wishes of the House wherever possible, I do think the Bill embodies the chief principles of the policy that we have professed, and which we have always advocated.

Well, but there is a right honourable gentleman who has to-night told us that he is no prophet, but who for half an hour indulged in a series of the most doleful vaticinations that were ever listened to. He says that everything is ruined, and he begins with the House of Lords. Such a singular catalogue of political catastrophes, and such a programme of the injurious consequences of this legislation, were never heard of. The right honourable gentleman says, ‘There is the House of Lords; it is not of the slightest use now, and what do you think will happen to it when this Bill passes?’ That was his argument. Well, my opinion is, if the House of Lords is at present in the position which the right honourable gentleman describes—and I am far from admitting it—then the passing of the Bill cannot do the House of Lords no harm, and it is very likely may do it a great deal of good. I think the increase of sympathy between the great body of the people and their natural leaders will be more likely to incite the House of Lords to action and to increased efforts to deserve and secure the gratitude and good feeling of the nation. ‘But,’ says the right honourable gentleman, ‘what is most terrible about the business of carrying this Bill is the treachery by which it has been accomplished.’ What I want to know from the right honourable gentleman is, when did the treachery begin? The right honourable gentleman thinks that a measure of Parliamentary Reform is an act

of treachery, in consequence of what took place last year, when those who now bring it forward were in frequent council and co-operation with those who then and now oppose it. I can only say, for myself, that I hear of these mysterious councils for the first time. But if a compact was entered into last year, when we were in Opposition, that no measure of Parliamentary Reform should pass, or any proposal with that object be made by us—if such a proposal is an act of treason, then the noble lord the member for Stamford and his friends are as guilty of treachery as we who sit on these benches. Really I should have supposed that the right honourable gentleman would have weighed his words a little more; that when he talks of treachery he would have tried to define what he means, and that he would have drawn some hard and straight line to tell us where this treachery commenced. The right honourable gentleman, however, throws no light on the subject. He made a speech to-night which reminded me of the production of some inspired schoolboy, all about the battles of Chæronea and of Hastings. I think he said that the people of England should be educated, but that the quality of the education was a matter of no consequence as compared with the quantity. Now, the right honourable gentleman seems to be in doubt as to what may be his lot in the new Parliament, and what I should recommend him to be—if he will permit me to give him advice—is the schoolmaster abroad. I should think that with his great power of classical and historical illustration the right honourable gentleman might soon be able to clear the minds of the new constituency of all ‘perilous stuff,’ and thus render them as soundly Conservative as he himself could desire.

I must, however, remind the right honourable gentleman when he tells us of the victims at Chæronea, to whom he likens himself, that they died for their country, and died expressing their proud exultation that their blood should be shed in so sacred a cause. But this victim of Chæronea takes the earliest opportunity, not of expressing his glory in his achievements and his sacrifice, but of absolutely announcing the conditions on which he is ready to join with those who have brought upon him so disgraceful a discomfiture. He has laid before us a



## HOUSEHOLD FRANCHISE (COUNTIES) BILL.

May 13, 1874.<sup>1</sup>

SIR, I am sorry that any observations that I have made anywhere should be displeasing to the honourable gentleman who brought forward this question, and still more am I sorry that I had not the advantage of listening to his speech to-day. The fact is, that as it was the second reading of a Bill that he had himself introduced, I, perhaps rashly, inferred that he would not address the House so early in the day, and therefore I was not in my place as soon as I ought to have been. But I can assure the honourable gentleman, however I may have been reported—and, as I have once before said, a good deal has happened since those observations were made—I clearly remember that the feelings under which I made them were not such as they have been interpreted to be by the honourable gentleman and by others. I do not for a moment wish to challenge the right of an independent member of the House to deal with any question, and certainly not with a question even of the importance of organic reform of the Constitution. I know well from my experience of this House that there are very few questions which ultimately greatly interest the country which have not been, and which are not, first introduced by members not connected with the Government. But in the particular instance which I had in my mind on the occasion of making the observation referred to, I wished to express my disapprobation of an independent member bringing forward a great question of organic reform in our Parliamentary Constitution behind a Government who were themselves

<sup>1</sup> This speech is reprinted from Hansard's *Debates* by permission of Mr. Hansard.

pledged to its principle. Under these circumstances I confess—although I may not have used the not very happy epithet referred to—I did express my entire disapprobation of such conduct; because I think that, if the party was in the condition we have heard, it was the duty of the Government of the country themselves to deal with the question. Now, Sir, what has surprised me most in the course of the remarks I have listened to closely, is that on the question of the conceding of political privileges to classes of our fellow-subjects, the expediency of such a course has been advocated on the plea that they are the rights of man. The right of certain classes to the franchise has been put forward by some speakers as the basis of our legislation. And I must say that many others who have addressed the House have really in the drift of their observations, although with some caution, assumed a position which in my mind I should have thought honourable gentlemen on both sides of the House would regard, not only as perilous, but as one which would not, and could not, commend itself to the acceptance of Parliament. The distribution of political power in the community is an affair of convention, and not an affair of moral or abstract right, and it is only in this sense that we can deal with it.

Now, as regards the classes which the honourable gentleman by his Bill seeks to invest with the franchise, I have no hesitation in giving my opinion. I have no doubt that the rated householder in the county is just as competent to exercise the franchise with advantage to the country as the rated householder in the towns. I have not the slightest doubt whatever that he possesses all those virtues which generally characterise the British people. And I have as little doubt that if he possessed the franchise he would exercise it with the same prudence and the same benefit to the community as the rated householder in the town. But we must remember that the classes who would receive the franchise if this Bill of the honourable gentleman were passed are not made up of the simple materials which some speakers in this debate have chosen to assume. I was struck very much by an observation of the honourable and gallant gentleman the member for the

county of Galway (Captain Nolan), who said there was this difference between England and Ireland in respect of this question, that in regard to England this was a question of admitting the labouring classes to the suffrage, while in Ireland it was a question of allowing various classes—small proprietors and others—to regain the suffrage: but he assumed that the question before us was merely the question whether the labouring classes in England should possess the franchise, and some honourable gentlemen—representatives of English constituencies, who ought to be better informed on the matter than the honourable and gallant member for Galway, have likewise mistaken the question.

The right honourable gentleman who has just addressed us with so much passionate fervour (Mr. W. E. Forster) said we were bound to admit the agricultural labourer to the franchise—a matter, according to the right honourable gentleman, of vital importance. Unless we admit the agricultural labour to the franchise, he asks, how are we to legislate upon that important question, the relations between master and servant, which he says is a most pressing question, and must occupy our attention next session? Then, he asks, without admitting the agricultural labourer to the franchise how are we to deal with the liquor laws? And, said the right honourable gentleman, looking forward with severe scrutiny, unless you enfranchise the agricultural labourer how are we to deal with the laws affecting the tenure of land? What inference, Sir, am I to draw from these important observations coming from so important a quarter? Why that an immediate dissolution is contemplated. If the agricultural labourers are to send members to the House of Commons to influence our decisions on those questions, it must be plain that the right honourable gentleman and his friends have been trained so to manœuvre their forces as to bring about an immediate dissolution, by which we can alone obtain the verdict from the new constitutencies. Now, Sir, the classes who would be enfranchised by the Bill of the right honourable gentleman are really of a very various character. I speak with some confidence as to the facts, because it has been my duty to examine very much into these details, and I

have very little hesitation in saying that if the Bill were passed the majority of those it would admit would not be of the labouring classes. The honourable gentleman will be surprised to hear that, as I shall show, the number of the agricultural classes would not by any means amount to a moiety of those who would be admitted. It is just as well that we should have clear and accurate ideas on this question.

Now, a word as to the agricultural labourers. It is said—although honourable members opposite appear to have arrived somewhat rapidly at a conclusion on a matter as to which it is difficult to form an accurate opinion—that the agricultural labourers demand the franchise. Well, the agricultural labourer throughout Great Britain is certainly not an identic animal. He differs in every county, and he differs in the same county very materially. The condition of those who are labouring on the land in the northern parts of England is one of great comfort, and, I may say, of great prosperity. The condition of the agricultural labourer in some of the southern parts is certainly very different. It forms a painful contrast, but that condition, I am bound to say, has greatly improved since the time when the agricultural community expressed their opinion—although the right honourable gentleman the member for Bradford says they have now done so for the first time—I mean the time of the Swing riots, forty years ago, just on the eve of great political changes in the country. The agricultural labourer, if you contrast his condition in 1830 or 1832 with the present time, even in the worst parts of the southern counties of England has immensely improved. The average increase during the last forty years in the rate of wages, even in the most—having been criticised for my epithets, I will not say ‘degraded’ part of the country population, but where they enjoy less the comforts of life, has certainly been 15 per cent.—some say more: their toil has been greatly diminished by the introduction of machinery; and we cannot deny that—although there is room for improvement which I hope will be accomplished—their abodes are infinitely better. Well, Sir, I am glad to hear the agricultural labourer spoken of now with such respect by honourable gentlemen opposite. I remember the

time when the tone was different. The right honourable gentleman the member for Bradford has in the handsomest manner confessed that the agricultural labourer is not a serf; but I remember that until very recently we were always told that he was, and it is to me a subject of considerable satisfaction to hear his virtues at last acknowledged by honourable gentlemen opposite. But in making these observations it does not at all follow that because there is a movement in that class at present—a movement which I for one look upon with no distrust and no fear, and which I believe will ultimately, and I hope will speedily, end in a change in their condition very advantageous to the country—it does not, I say, at all follow that we should immediately, without thought, without the slightest reference to many weighty considerations which I will endeavour briefly to lay before the House—that we should—above all in a moment of excitement—whatever may be the cause, however just it may be, when there exist a variety of circumstances, hopeful, I trust, for their eventual benefit, but not conducive to calm reflection and cool judgment—I do not think there is a *primâ facie* case for suddenly advancing them to and investing them with the franchise.

Sir, there is one excellent feature in this movement among the peasantry of England, and it is this: the stir that is being made among them—I am throwing aside particular instances of exaggeration and artificial agitation which, I think, may be traced to speculative individuals, who will always have a hand in anything like a popular movement—but, generally speaking, the stir in the agricultural community does not, in this instance, arise from any sense of oppression. It is not sense of oppression which has made them discontented with their lot; on the contrary, although they may not, taking them altogether, have risen as rapidly as the other working classes, but perhaps more regularly, still their condition has always been one of progressive improvement. But they feel that they live in a time when great advances are made in all classes, and they are not satisfied that they have advanced sufficiently. But you never find—generally speaking—that they impute their condition to any oppression on the part of their employers. This is appa-

rent from the absence of any acts of violence—they are ready to argue their case. They argue it often with great fallacy, and they often decide upon a course which will end in their disappointment. But as far as the great body of the labouring population is concerned, they are as little influenced by embittered feelings as probably has ever been known in a great popular movement.

Now, Sir, my great objection to the Bill of the right honourable gentleman is this: that there is no case in which large classes of our fellow-subjects have been invested with the franchise without a general distribution of power in consequence being considered. That is a point which has been most entirely evaded throughout this debate, and has only been noticed by the right honourable gentleman the member for Bradford to show that he was aware of the difficulty. The right honourable gentleman with great skill, having announced to the House that he knew of the rock ahead, said there was nothing in it, and avoided it altogether. In fact, the only illustration upon which the right honourable gentleman founded his belief that there was nothing in the objection, that you cannot invest large bodies of the people of this country with electoral privileges without considering and reviewing the redistribution of political power, was a quotation from his own poll-book, in which he informed us that 3,000 original electors had been turned by me into 20,000, and that I had not added members to Bradford. Now, let us look at the case in a little more business-like manner. I may remind honourable members that in the year 1866 the House came to a most deliberate—I may say, to a most solemn—decision, in one of the fullest Houses I recollect, that any enfranchisement of large classes of the country must be accompanied by a redistribution of seats. That decision was come to in an important division, for it virtually changed the Government. Well, in 1867 the then Government brought forward a Reform Bill which greatly increased the numbers of the constituency. Did they attempt to do that without revising and considering the subject of that redistribution of political power? There were at that time 45 seats at the disposal of the Government, obtained by the disfranchisement of small

boroughs—the total disfranchisement of some, and the partial disfranchisement of the rest. Of the 45 seats, 25 were allotted to counties, and the rest to boroughs, including one to a university. Therefore, the right honourable gentleman will see that we acted entirely in unison with the principle laid down in the resolution; and we did it in this way because it was argued that a man who had a vote as a rated householder in Bradford, if he passed the boundary of his borough, might meet another rated householder who had no vote; and that was an anomaly. We found that unless we revised and redistributed the Parliamentary seats, all those anomalies would be greatly aggravated, by adding great numbers to the constituencies.

Let me mention to the House the addition to be made to the number of electors in England and Wales. I have no data before me for a similar calculation for Scotland and Ireland, though I have details on other points. The boroughs for England and Wales contain 1,800,000 inhabited houses, providing for the register 1,250,000 voters: that is, the voters are to houses as 25 to 36. The counties contain 2,500,000 houses, providing at present 720,000 voters, after deducting 80,000 for qualifications within the boroughs. Assuming that the county householders would come upon the register in the same ratio as borough householders now come, the county voters, under the Bill of the honourable gentleman, would number 1,740,000, while the borough voters would remain at the number 1,250,000: that is to say, household suffrage would add 1,000,000 to county voters, and cause county voters to exceed borough voters by 500,000. And now, as the result, 1,740,000 county voters would return 187 members to Parliament, while 1,250,000 borough voters would return 297 members. Is it possible, as the right honourable gentleman says, ‘to be deaf and blind’ to facts and circumstances like these? Is it possible for any man with the responsibility, I will not say of a minister, but of a member of Parliament, to propose to legislate in that harumscarum way, on the ground that they are anomalies, because a rated householder out of Bradford has not a vote, and a rated householder in Bradford has a vote? And is he to remedy that anomaly by producing the exaggerated and aggra-

vated national anomaly which I have pointed out? I do not mean to say there is no remedy except by resorting to absolutely equal electoral districts. I do not want to put the case on that extreme position. ‘*Est modus in rebus*,’ and we must remember that in all these questions great difficulties can be avoided by an assembly which has such past experience of practical politics as the House of Commons.

But no one can deny that the consequence of adopting the recommendation of the honourable member for the Border Burghs, and enfranchising these classes, is that practically we must look also to the redistribution of seats at the same time. No one can deny that in so doing we must move in the direction of electoral districts. Why, all our late legislation for the last forty years with respect to Parliamentary Reform and the distribution of seats has been leading to electoral districts, and although I, for one, should think it a great misfortune if we entirely destroyed all local influences and distinctions; although I believe if we did we should very much weaken the spirit and character of the country; and although I hold that we ought to cling as much as possible to maintaining those local influences and distinctions; still it is impossible not to see that if you do reconsider and redistribute political power in deference to these views, you must to a great extent be approaching electoral districts. I will take the whole population of the United Kingdom at 31,450,000. Now, divide that into equal electoral districts; it may never be divided into equal electoral districts, but we must recollect that there is a constant tendency to that. You would have one representative for each 48,000 of your population. What would be the effect of that upon particular constituencies? If the country were divided into equal, or anything approaching equal, electoral districts, the result would be this: in England and Wales 147 boroughs out of a total of 198 would lose their right to special representation, as containing fewer than 48,000 inhabitants. Among them would be Carlisle, I am sorry to say Gloucester, the city of Oxford, Cambridge, Chester, Tynemouth, Coventry, Chatham, Exeter, and Northampton. In addition to the above 147 borough constituencies, four counties in England and Wales would cease to



be specially represented. In Scotland, out of a total of 22 boroughs, 13 would lose special representation, including Perth and Stirling; while in Ireland, out of a total of 31 boroughs, 27 would be disfranchised, including Derry and Waterford. Now, we are approaching the possibility of such consequences as these arising from our dealing with the numbers in constituencies, and I think it is well for honourable gentlemen to pause and reflect a little on the possible results of such a proposal. These results, as I have shown, would be that 147 boroughs in England and Wales, 13 in Scotland, and 27 in Ireland—that is, 187 constituencies in the United Kingdom, out of a total of 420—would be disfranchised. If you go to that excess, you must see that, in making a movement of this kind without considering those collateral conditions and arrangements which are inseparably connected with it, you are striking a blow, and a fatal blow, at the borough constitution of the United Kingdom.

Now, Sir, I am not prepared to take that step. I believe our system of borough representation is one which, on the whole, has been very favourable to the enlightenment and the liberties of England and of the kingdom generally, and I cannot say that I think this is a policy which could in any way be encouraged. I never have been an upholder of small or close boroughs. I entirely agree in the opinions expressed by Mr. Pitt at the beginning of this century. A long time has elapsed since they were uttered; but they were worthy of the man who had that great reach of mind which distinguished Mr. Pitt. He was prevented, unfortunately, from carrying out the policy he wished to pursue; but I hope we have been able in the course of the last forty years to remedy this in a very great degree. Therefore, I am not myself in favour of small close boroughs, and as to those young gentlemen who wish for introduction into public life, there are many ways in which they can be introduced without being coddled and nursed in hot-houses of that kind. At the same time I should be very sorry to see the class of boroughs with 20,000 or 25,000 of population all erased from the Parliamentary map, and I must add, after the most able speech made to-day by my honourable

friend the member for Stafford (Mr. Salt), in proposing the amendment, that I should be very sorry even to see the borough of Stafford disfranchised. But we must prepare ourselves for this if we are about to effect such immense changes in the representation of this country as would produce this consequence, that nearly 2,000,000 of voters would be represented by 187 members, and only 1,250,000 by nearly 300 members. It is quite clear that the moment you have passed an enfranchisement of this kind, we must be prepared to have our time entirely occupied in efforts to reassert the balance of the Constitution and obtain some tolerable representation of the people of England, which we shall otherwise have completely destroyed. There is no doubt that through that variety of representation which is so much admired and appreciated the boroughs of England have greatly benefitted.

Sir, these are the main reasons why I am entirely opposed to the motion of the honourable member for the Border Burghs. I agree with several honourable gentlemen who have spoken in this debate in thinking that it is an unwise thing for a State always to be speculating on organic change, especially in a country like this, an old country, a country influenced greatly by tradition, a country which respects authority from habit, a country which expects in the distribution of political power that it should be invested as much as possible with a venerable character. Nor can I shut my eyes to the fact that in this matter of organic change and in the redistribution of political power our course of late years has been very rapid and decisive. I look forward to the consequences of those measures—whether they be those for which I and my colleagues were responsible, or those for which right honourable gentlemen opposite were responsible—with little alarm, with unshaken confidence in the good sense of the people of England. But we must remember that they have had a great meal to digest; and I am not quite sure that they have yet entirely assimilated the nutrition which has been profusely supplied to them. We should not now, in a most unnecessary manner, disturb the political conscience of the country when, as I think, the public mind is not intent upon change, and when the very class on whose position the right honourable gentle-

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man the member for Bradford has most rested his argument and his appeal—namely, agricultural labourers—are only a portion, and not the largest portion, of those interested in this question. The mind of that class is occupied, not with political change, but rather with the elevation of their social condition; and when the disposition of the country is favourable; beyond any preceding time that I can recall, to a successful consideration of the social wants of the great body of the people, I think it would be most unwise to encourage this fever for organic change, and that it would be most expedient for the House of Commons by their vote to-day to give a decided negative to the motion of the honourable gentleman.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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